GODDESS OF WORLD 21—Hated By Women—Preyed On By Men

fantastic

ANC

SCIENCE-FICTION

MARCH 35¢

A ZIFF-DAVIS PUBLICATION

1957 PHOTOGRAPHY ANNUAL

A selection of the world's greatest photographs by the editors of Popular Photography

PHOTOGRAPHY ANNUAL 1957 EDITION

NOW ON SALE EVERYWHERE!

FANTASTIC, Vol. 6, No. 2, March 1957, is published bi-monthly by Ziff-Davis Publishing Company, William B. Ziff, Chairman of the Board (1946-1953), at 64 E. Lake St., Chicago 1, Illinois. Entered as second-class matter at Post Office at Chicago, Ill. Subscription rates: U. S. and possessions and Canada $4.00 for 12 issues; Pan American Union Countries $4.50; all other foreign countries $5.00.

It Sounds Fantastic, But . . .

Two automobiles stolen from different sections of Baltimore at night crashed into each other the next afternoon.

While visiting an exhibition in Birmingham, England, a young man had a cigarette knocked out of his mouth by a falling "No Smoking" sign.

After an express train hit his car near Fort Wayne, Ind., and reduced it to scrap, Walter Tyler climbed out of the wreckage without a scratch.

Lyman E. Clement, of Searsburg, Vt., died at his home after returning from a town meeting where he was defeated for the post of cemetery commissioner.

An escapee from a Fairfax, Va., road gang thumbed a ride —with a police car that happened to be looking for him.

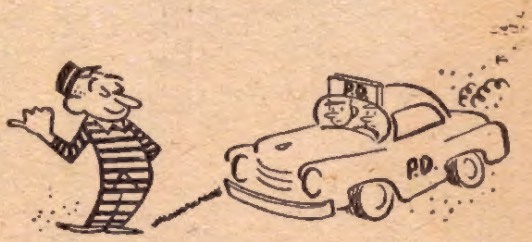
After a Newburghport, Mass., truck driver smashed into a train, he got out to confront the engineer, discovered it was his father.

A Baltimore man requested a life insurance company to cancel one of his two policies. As the cancellation papers were being drawn up, he dropped dead of a heart attack.

"This is a good laying hen," said Mrs. Eldon Legg, of Vinity, Okla., in a farm lecture. The proud hen promptly laid an egg in Mrs. Legg's hand.

Eight derailed freight cars piled up in the backyard of Christopher McCarthy, who happens to be a member of a railroad wrecking crew.

A Newark, N. J., attorney got prompt service when he reported his car stolen. A radio flash brought an immediate answer from a patrol car: "This auto is right in front of us." The thief was arrested at the first traffic light.



When Lawrence Sprung's car was wrecked near Linday, Canada, he escaped without injuries. But as he stood looking at the debris, a passing car killed him instantly.

(Continued on page 118)

fantastic

MARCH 1957

Volume 6 Number 2

REG. U. S. PAT. OFF.

ZIFF-DAVIS PUBLISHING COMPANY
William B. Ziff (1898-1953) Founder
Editorial and Executive Offices
366 Madison Avenue
New York 17, New York

President
B. G. DAVIS

Vice Presidents —
H. J. MORGANROTH
MICHAEL H. FROELICH
MICHAEL MICHAELSON

Secretary-Treasurer
G. E. CARNEY

Art Director
ALBERT GRUEN

FICTION

THE GODDESS OF WORLD 21
By Henry Slesar..... 6

FORGOTTEN WORLD
By Robert Silverberg..... 47

CITADEL OF DARKNESS
By Ralph Burke..... 58

THE DEAD COMPANIONS
By Stanley Mullen..... 78

SWORDS AGAINST THE OUTWORLDERS
By Calvin Knox..... 90

FREAK SHOW
By Hall Thornton..... 119

FEATURES

IT SOUNDS FANTASTIC, BUT . . .
By Paul Steiner..... 3

ACCORDING TO YOU . . .
By The Readers..... 115

THE BOOK RACK
By Villiers Gerson..... 126

SUPERLATIVES 129

Cover: EDWARD VALIGURSKY

Editor
PAUL W. FAIRMAN

Assistant Editor
CELE GOLDSMITH

Art Editor
HERBERT ROGOFF

© 1956 by Ziff-Davis Publishing Company. All rights reserved.

How Would You Use

UNLIMITED POWER?

**If, at will, you could *be* anyone—
do anything in the world . . .**

. . . would you choose to be President?

. . . would you draw a million dollars out of the nearest bank?

. . . would you choose a glamorous movie star as your wife?

. . . would you use your power for good or evil?

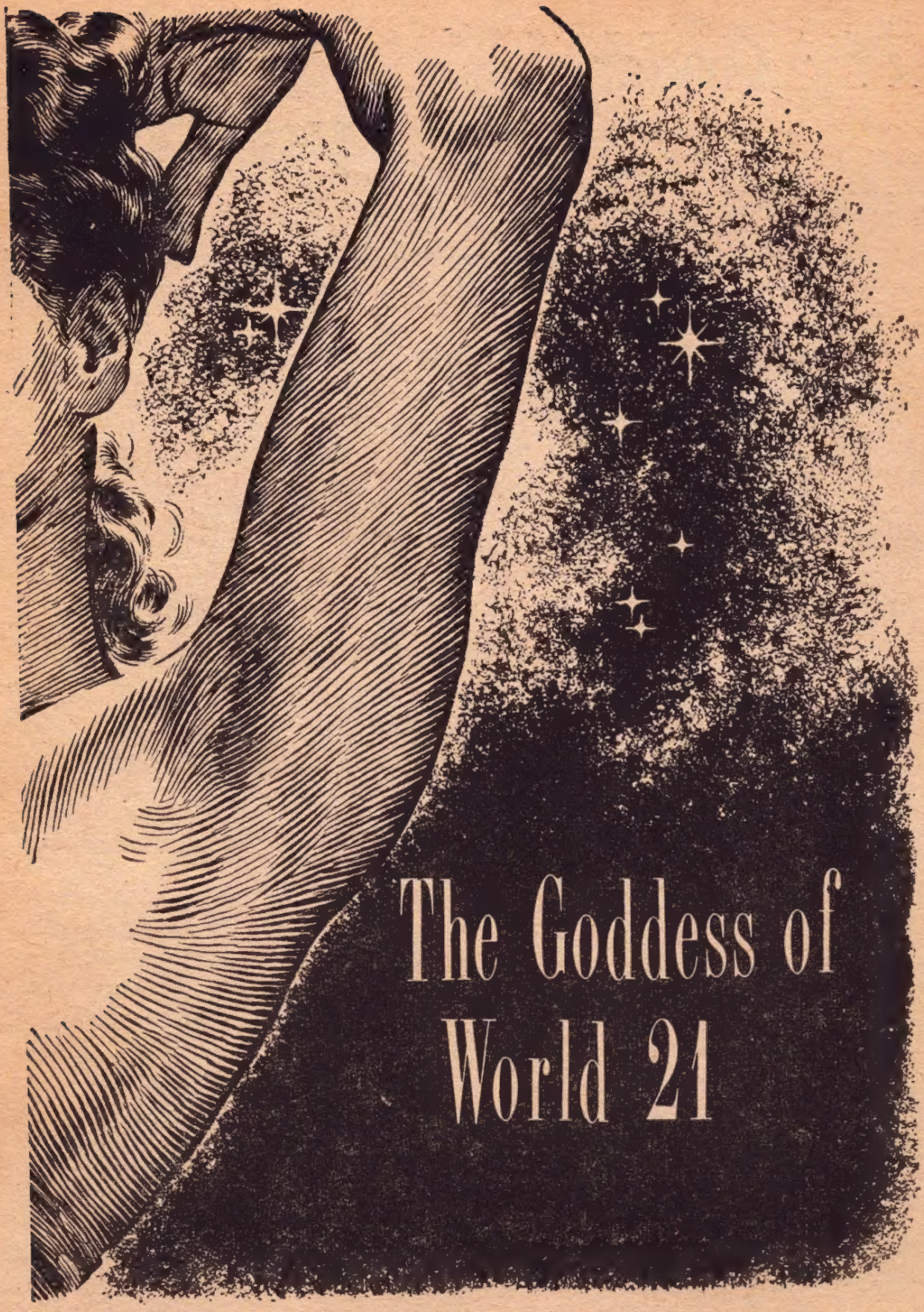
If the idea intrigues you, you're sure to enjoy DREAM WORLD, an entirely new type of Science Fantasy! In DREAM WORLD, you'll share the adventures of ordinary men and women who are suddenly granted extraordinary powers.

A ZIFF-DAVIS PUBLICATION

Watch for DREAM WORLD!

Now on Sale at Your Favorite Newsstand

A visit with Victoria involved a long and



The Goddess of World 21

hazardous climb, but was worth the danger.

The Goddess of World 21

By HENRY SLESAR

Victoria was due for trouble—with her love life among other things. How could she keep a boy friend around when her softest sigh was likely to blow him halfway back to town? And how many guys were likely to climb a hundred feet for a kiss? How many? Well, placed end-to-end they would have reached the farthest space station without a rocket.

THE Universal Press Service Building was a squatty chunk of stubborn granite, set down defiantly amid the airy structures of downtown New York. It was all business and a block wide, yet some peculiar characters came through its entrance. Today was no exception.

This morning, it was a disreputable man in second-hand space gear, with dusty mismatched boots and a week's stubble on his brown lined face.

He shuffled his way through the lobby, avoiding the eyes of the UPS employees moving in and out of the elevators. He mumbled a question to one of them, and was directed to the fourteenth floor. The frosty receptionist who guarded that portal dropped her temperature by ten degrees when she saw him.

"Er—this guy Stu Champion," he said. "Can I see him?"

"In reference to what?"

The man unzipped the front of his jacket and lifted out a folded edition of a newspaper. It was a battered copy of the *Callisto Clarion,* and from its condition, obviously more than six months old. He shoved it under the girl's nose, and she backed off to look at the squared half-tone that adorned Stuart Champion's syndicated feature column. It was a flattering portrait, but it was unmistakably Stu, with his young, narrow face, bristly black hair, and slightly Oriental eyes.

"This is the guy, ain't it?"

He rattled the newssheets rudely.

"Why, yes. But Mr. Champion is rather busy—"

The man's face, a testament to the rigors of outer space with its burned, pitted flesh and raggedly engraved lines, suddenly adopted a knowing leer. He scratched the wiry growth on his chin and said: "You just tell him I been to Gulliver. That's all you do. You tell him that."

The receptionist frowned, but the cryptic request was effective. She dialed Stu Champion's office and repeated the message. He seemed equally puzzled, but he growled affirmatively.

"Third door down the hall," the girl said.

The UPS reporter was half-hidden behind the debris of papers on the scarred wooden desk. He was crouched hungrily over the typewriter, scowling like a wild animal caught at its meal. But his face changed when the whiskery stranger entered.

"Mr. Champion?"

"That's the culprit. What can I do for you, Mr.—?" The deliberate pause didn't work. The man just stood there.

"You wrote this article, right?" He produced it, and waved the paper in front of Stu's face accusingly. "I was on a freighter making the Callisto run. That's where I saw it. I came back last July. I ain't doing much space work now. Okay if I sit down?"

He sighed with fatigue, as if the long speech had winded him. Stu nodded him into a chair, and cleared a path through the papers in front of him.

"Let's start from scratch," he said. "I gather you work the merchant ships. Right?"

"Yeah." The man looked at the floor. "Only not for a while. I flunked the exam last July."

"Would you mind telling me your name?"

"Mackey. Russ Mackey."

Stu reached over and took the folded newspaper.

"*Callisto Clarion,* January. Sure, I wrote the article, Mr. Mackey. Only not for the *Clarion.* My column gets syndicated to around eight thousand papers through twelve star systems. You could have read it anyplace." He smirked a little, but Mackey's reaction was a wooden stare.

Stu Champion looked him over carefully. He was a down-and-outer, no question of that. A space bum, picking up odd jobs on the merchant

fleets until the Space Authority caught up with the fact that too much acceleration and cheap whiskey had wrecked too many of Mackey's blood vessels and arteries. Now he was drifting around the spaceports of Earth, telling whoppers and cadging drinks from tourists.

Stu cleared his throat. "Just what do you need from me, Mr. Mackey?"

"Like I told the girl. I *been* to that place you wrote about, Mr. Champion. Gulliver, I mean. I thought you'd like to hear about it."

Stu spread open the newssheets, hiding his sneer behind them. He was sure now that his analysis was correct. Mackey was trying to turn some wild space yarn into hard cash. But he was up against Mr. Skeptic himself.

"I see," he said gently. "Well, I write an awful lot of cra—articles, Mr. Mackey. I better refresh my memory."

He turned to his column. It was pleasant, reading his own words.

GULLIVER
Giant planet . . . or giant hoax?

Not since the mad and merry days of the 20th Century, whose Flying Saucers kept the populace in a perpetual state of happy anxiety, has Dame Rumor enjoyed herself so much. This time, her stock-in-trade is a tale concerning a planet roughly described as eight times the size of Jupiter, whose atmospheric advantages have produced a race identical to Earth's in every respect but one. The inhabitants are all the size of Jonathon Swift's hapless hero Lemuel Gulliver, on his excursion to the land of the Lilliputs. These Brobdingnagians (to plagiarize Mr. Swift even further) are purported to be entirely civilized and well advanced, leading ordinary lives—working, playing, making love, getting into scrapes, catching head colds, and in general, behaving like the rest of us. This planet, popularly called Gulliver, is the subject of much fascinated speculation. As a tourist attraction, it would obviously rival anything in the cosmos. Not even Damon Scully's ubiquitous Space Circus, with its fifteen-foot giant, could hope to rival the lure of Gulliver. There's only one problem. Nobody knows where Gulliver is. In fact, there's some question whether Gulliver exists anywhere outside of the spacemen's famous imagination. This last statement will undoubtedly inspire hundreds of

indignant letters. Fine; my publishers set great store by indignant letters. But allow me to state here and now that I refuse to pass judgment on Gulliver's reality or lack of it. Yet it must be admitted that none of the reports are supported by tangible evidence. (I am ignoring that gigantic pair of shoes so carefully constructed by those whimsical students at Princeton.) No one has claimed to have made landfall on Gulliver itself. But spacemen have "seen" their enormous spaceships, and have "discovered" tracks on uncharted worlds, tracks supposedly made by the Gullivers themselves on exploratory jaunts. I'm no lawyer, men, but that ain't blue-ribbon evidence. There's room for speculation . . .

Stu Champion pulled his eyes away from the print, and smiled at his visitor.

"Okay," he said. "I'm willing to listen. But you might as well quote the price in advance."

Russ Mackey looked shrewd. "I don't want nothing in advance, Mr. Champion. I'll tell you everything I know. If it leads you someplace, it oughta be worth five grand."

"Five grand's a lot of money."

"Not to the guy who finds Gulliver."

"And you can lead me there?"

"I didn't say that, Mr. Champion. I left the joint in a big blind hurry after the giant put my tail rocket back into shape. My instruments was on the blink, too. I just set the pilot and drifted out with my fingers crossed—"

"Whoa!" Stu cried. "You lost me, pal. You trying to tell me you've *been* to this Gulliver place?"

"That's right. Only don't ask for directions, Mr. Champion. I can't help you that way."

Stu leaned back in his chair, and found something unusual happening to him. He was *believing* this bearded, shifty-eyed bum.

"Okay," he said. "Let's hear it."

Mackey leaned forward.

"There ain't too much to tell. Me and a pal of mine, we got hooked up with a mining company out working the Antares chain. We were operating a two-man cruiser running ore samples to the home planet. One day, we're out on a routine flight and get swatted by a meteor shower—that fine stuff, you know? They call it Hell Rain—and we conk out from the heat. Next

thing I know, I wake up with the instruments and radio burned out, and my pal fried to hamburger. He wasn't pretty, and he didn't smell so good neither. I shot a photo of his body to satisfy the legal beagles, and then dumped him through the airlock."

He spoke of horrors with the spaceman's affected carelessness. Stu grimaced.

"Me, I was lucky," Mackey continued. "Just minor burns. Only I didn't know where the cruiser was. There was no record on the instruments, and I didn't know how long I was unconscious. By the time I get my senses back, the ship's caught in an orbit. I got to the landing controls fast as I could, but I couldn't set her down without bending the tail. You know what that means."

"No," Stu said.

"It figured the planet would be uncharted. I'd never get the cruiser off again with a bent tailpipe. Curtains."

"But you *did* get off?"

"Sure," said Mackey. "That is what I'm telling you. *She* got me off."

"She?" Stu said. It was a switch. So far, Mackey's story followed the well-established plot line of the typical space-whopper: the old Robinson Crusoe stuff, embellished with tales of alien beasts stranger than anything in Scully's Space Circus.

"That's what I said," Mackey insisted. "I dropped down on this planet, and first thing I know, this sky-high dame is bearing down on the ship. I was scared, let me tell you. She was big as a house —maybe a hundred feet tall. And *pretty,* you know? A real looker. I see her comin' through the viewport and almost passed out. She shouts something at me. It was so loud, I could feel the cruiser vibrating. Next thing I know, she's bending down and looking in the viewport. Biggest goddam blue eye you ever saw—so much of her and all good lookin'!"

Stu found himself chuckling. "Sure it wasn't a dream?"

"It was for real! She's looking at me with a grin big as a crater. Then she says something like 'domino' . . ."

"Domino? What did that mean?"

"I dunno. But that's what she said. 'Domino?'—like it was a question. Then she musta seen how scared I was, because she says, 'Don't be scared. Please don't be scared.' . . ."

"In English?"

"Perfect English. Just like you and me speak."

"Um," Stu grunted.

"I know it sounds crazy. Anyway, I got out of the ship and told her what the trouble was. She bends over and fiddles with the cruiser like it was a toy. Next thing I know, she's straightening out the bent tailpipe. I didn't waste no time after that. I climbed in and got ready to blast off. She looked kind of surprised, and begged me to stay awhile. She says her name's Victoria, and she's plenty lonely up there—"

"Victoria?"

"That's what she says. She wants me to keep her company, get it? Only I wasn't buyin' it. She seemed harmless enough, but I figured her big brother might come along any minute. So off I went."

"Easy as that?"

"So help me. I shot the cruiser out into space, hoping to get picked up by an Earth ship. I was lucky, let me tell you. In about forty hours, a patrol vessel spotted me. When I didn't respond to their radio signal, they sent out a grapple and pulled me alongside. That's how I got back to the home planet. I told them the story, but they thought I was delirious. Guess I was. I was runnin' up a fever by that time, so they dumped me on a hospital ship, Earthbound. That's where I had my last exam." He scowled at the memory.

"And that's the whole story?" Stu said.

"That's it. From the direction I was traveling, I'd figure Gulliver was one of that ring of planets on the fourth vector of Antares. That's the closest I could figure.

Stu whistled. "You're talking about several billion miles and some nine hundred worlds, pal. All uncharted. It would take a lifetime to visit them all."

"Maybe so," Mackey said grimly. "Only who knows? You could be lucky the first time."

"Sure," Stu said. He reached into his trouser pocket and came out with some folded bills. He peeled two off the top and passed them across the desk. "Go on, take it. I'm not backing out of our deal. This is just a down payment."

Mackey took it uncertainly. "Okay, Mr. Champion. I won't kid you; I can use the dough."

He stood up and went to the door. Then he turned and said: "Only I'm tellin' the truth, Mr. Champion. Understand?"

"Sure," Stu said sourly, waving his hand.

The reporter sat chewing his thumbnail for five minutes after Mackey left. His half-hour's entertainment had cost him twenty bucks. Yet for a while back there, the son of a gun had actually convinced him. . . .

He turned back to his typewriter, shrugging.

It was an hour later that the name clicked in his mind. He whirled away from the machine, and tripped the lever on the ancient intercom on his desk. As usual, it was on the blink.

"Claire!" he bellowed.

His secretary, an owl-eyed spinster who thought Stu was Hemingway reincarnated, came scurrying through the doorway.

"Yes, Mr. Champion?"

"Look—do you remember an article I did on a guy named Domino last year? Dr. Domino."

"It *sounds* familiar."

"It had something to do with a laboratory of his. In Wisconsin, I think." He rubbed the short hair on the back of his head. "What the hell was it called?"

"I could check the files, Mr. Champion."

"No, wait! I remember now. It was called the Biocellular Lab. Something to do with growing arms and legs—"

Claire swallowed. "Oh, yes. I remember the story. He was a sort of—crackpot."

"I dunno. But dig it up for me, sweetie. It's important."

Her eyes melted at the thought of such a significant assignment. She hurried out of the room, determined to make an outstanding effort.

She succeeded. In five minutes, she was waving a galley proof in front of Stu's eyes. He snatched it from her hand and read it over swiftly.

NEW ARMS AND LEGS?
Wisconsin Laboratory
Plans to Grow Them

Hold your hats, kiddies—now the Mad Scientists are getting ready to grow arms and legs and assorted organs right in the laboratroy. The outfit dedicated to this ambitious project is innocently named the Biocellular Laboratory, near Kenosha, Wisconsin, and is operated under the direction of a gentleman known as Dr. Alvin Domino. Dr. Domino, who looks nothing like the Hollywood concept of the screwy savant, is a tall, muscular gent with dark black eyes and a temper to match. This was on exhibit

when I called on the good doctor on a recent trip he made to this city. When I asked him about his laboratory's activities, his reaction was something less than friendly. However, he was willing to admit, grudgingly, that the Biocellular Lab was engaged in work "roughly in the nature of" growing new limbs and organs for those who have been deprived of them. He stated that such work is not new, but that his techniques are radical and require many years of controlled experimentation. That was about all I could learn from Dr. Domino, before he clearly indicated that my departure would not be a sad event. Taking the hint, I left. If any of my readers are interested, I must warn them that any letters addressed to Dr. Domino will in all probability go unanswered. . . .

"Is it what you want?" Claire asked anxiously. She felt it must be.

"I dunno. Things don't connect. But suppose you set up an appointment with Dr. Domino for this morning? I'll requisition a copter and fly out to this Wisconsin lab of his—"

"Then you won't be going to the Circus?"

He looked at her blankly. "What?"

"Oh, my goodness!" Claire slapped her right cheek. "I left it on your desk this morning, and forgot to remind you."

"Left what?"

She fluttered through the papers on his desk. When she came up with the envelope, she breathed a sigh of relief.

"Here it is! Stupid of me. I'm so sorry, Mr. Champion—"

"Okay, okay. Let's have a look at it."

There was a stiff yellow card inside, and a brief note. The card read:

ADMIT ONE
SCULLY'S SPACE CIRCUS
"Greatest Show in
the Universe"

The note read:

Dear Stu—
Hope you can make the show today. About time you gave us a free puff. Have some great new acts that you'll get a kick out of. Look forward t seeing you.

Damon

"Stu and Damon!" the reporter said disgustedly. "Since when does that sneaky bum get so friendly?"

Then he read the P.S.

P.S. If you see a seedy character named Mackey today, watch out for your wallet.

D.

The UPS copter pilot commandeered by Stu Champion grinned appreciatively when told their destination was the circus ground in Basil, New York.

"Man, that Venus Snake Dance is something," he said. "I caught it down in South America last year."

Stu growled something and slumped in his seat. The pilot was talkative throughout the half-hour journey upstate, reminiscing about the more erotic aspects of Scully's spectacle. But Stu was too busy with his own speculations.

Stuart Champion had picked up a fair camp of enemies in his fourteen years as a reporter, but not one was more enthusiastically reciprocated than Damon Scully. Single-handed, Scully had done more to distort the ideals of Phineas T. Barnum than any man in the universe. Old Phineas wasn't above a few questionable gambits himself, but Scully had outdone the old maestro in spades. It wasn't Scully's occasional hoaxes that troubled Stu. It was his shameful exploitation of the alien creatures that inhabited the twelve Earth-colonized star systems. Stu had done a blistering article on the subject once, but he was disgusted at the outcome. Attendance at Scully's Space Circus had almost trebled after its appearance. "Shocking!" said his loyal readers—and then immediately made their reservations.

They checked in at the copterport at one o'clock, and the pilot vanished into the stream of human traffic pushing its way towards the plastic bubble-tent that housed the show. Stu used his press card, and was saved an hour's wait.

Once inside, he had to admit to a thrill of crude excitement as he surveyed the garish, 3-D posters that circled the bubble. This wasn't a circus in the old-fashioned sense. The entire affair consisted of a 300-degree circle of individual attractions, each on a pay-as-you-enter affair. It was nothing more than a glorified freak show, but with curiosities beyond the wildest dreams of any circus impresario before Damon Scully.

Stu pushed his way through the goggling, gawking crowd

and started for Damon Scully's office, located between the Jupiter Snow Girl and the Eating Trees of Betelguese. But his footsteps slowed as he realized that some new additions had, indeed, been made since his last visit.

He paused at one of them, gawking a bit himself at the brilliant poster that heralded the attraction.

COME IN AND
KILL THE DRAGON!
See if You can Slay the
Monster from Ursa Minor!
Razor-Sharp Swords
Provided FREE!
Watch the Dragon Repair
Itself Before Your Eyes
Safe Enough for Children

The crowd behind him began to push, and he allowed himself to be shuffled forward, his eyes hypnotically on the poster. Before he was really certain of his intentions, Stu found himself dropping a coin into the entrance machine and moving into the exhibit. He stopped thinking about Damon Scully; he let his mind become a blank. Yet deep down, he knew that the poster had magnetized him as surely as it would any yokel from the hill country; that he was aching with curiosity to see this Dragon and try his hand at slaying it. . . .

At the entrance, to the right, was a rack of gleaming broadswords, and a recorded tape said: "Take one, take one . . ." He lifted one out, hefted it in his hand and found its fine balance pleasing. When his fingers closed around the gracefully curved handle, his heart began pounding, and he shivered slightly with the sense of satisfaction this instrument of slashing death provided him. He shook it in anticipation, and continued down the corridor where the Dragon would be located. He felt elated, uplifted; an inner voice told him that disgust would follow later, but now he didn't care, he didn't give a damn. . . .

Then he saw the Dragon.

The man in front of him, a pudgy tourist with camera, binoculars, and portable radio strapped around his chest, paled suddenly and dropped his sword. But then the taped voice spoke out its words of instruction and reassurance.

"Don't be alarmed at the appearance of the Dragon, ladies and gentlemen. This incredible beast, discovered in the mud jungles of World 12 in Ursa Minor, is completely vegetarian and non-belligerent. As you can see, it resembles a blob of animated

bubble gum (the announcer chuckled here) with tentacle projections which provide it with locomotion. At the moment, it may appear to be some ten feet tall or a mere five feet; this is the result of the Dragon's peculiar elasticity. Now I'm going to lift the front of the Dragon's cage, and you yourself will be able to demonstrate the most remarkable characteristic of this alien beast: its ability to repair its own body when damaged. Strike hard and fast at the Dragon with your sword. Don't worry about it striking back. Some fifty thousand visitors to the Space Circus have attacked the Dragon, and without danger. Strike where you please. The elongated growth on top constitutes the Dragon's head. The tentacles — there are twenty-two of them—are its 'arms' and 'legs.' Strike swiftly, and kindly do not spend more than thirty seconds in the cage; there's a long line of people behind you. Thank you very much!"

The pudgy man with the paraphernalia seemed emboldened by these words. When the cage lifted, and the blubbery pink thing inside swayed silently before him, he set upon it with a horrendous screech. Again and again, he brought the broadsword down on the yeilding flesh of the Dragon. His first blow slashed an opening in the beast's side that was quickly closed over. His second hacked off a tentacle. Swiftly, the beast shifted to cover the detached member with the rest of his body, and seemed to absorb the rubbery flesh back into itself. Again and again the little man wielded the sword, the perspiration streaming down his fat, round face, his eyes wild and dangerous. It was obviously a moment of terrible, primeval happiness.

Then it was Stu's turn. But something had happened to his pounding pulse as he watched the little man vent a lifetime's frustrations on the dumb freak from an alien world. The disgust was coming on him, and his excitement disappeared. He paused in front of the swaying pink thing that was busily contorting itself back into shape. Then he shrugged his shoulders and moved on without lifting his sword. He dropped it in the bin at the exit gate, and went out. He felt better now.

He went to find Damon Scully.

Stu located him behind a beautiful receptionist, a beau-

tiful secretary, and finally, a beautiful mahogany desk. The circus man jumped to his feet when Stu entered, smiling broadly.

Scully was a small-boned man, but tall and erect. His sleek face was handsome, in a lined British sort of way, and he had long abandoned a rough New York accent for an affected London turn of speech. He might have been fifty or sixty; there wasn't any telling. He took care of himself, pampering his body with Vitamin-ray treatments that kept his skin smooth and his eyes clear, his white hair lush and lustrous.

He extended his hand, and Stu took it grudgingly.

"Glad you could make it," Scully said. "Thought it was about time you saw our new attractions, old man."

"I really haven't seen them all," Stu drawled. "Tell you the truth, Mr. Scully, I was more interested in the postscript on your letter."

Scully smiled, revealing perfect white teeth.

"Ah. You mean this Mackey chap. A real Baron Munchausen, don't you think?"

"I dunno. But what I can't figure out, Mr. Scully, is how you knew he was coming to see me this morning."

Scully chuckled. "Trade secret, Stu. I manage to learn a great number of things. I'm a business man."

"Then you don't think he was telling the truth?"

"Oh, I don't say that. The question is, old man—what do *you* think?"

"I told him I'd look into it."

"Then you *are* interested?"

"Perhaps."

"Good," Scully said briskly. "Then maybe you and I can discuss business. I'm an admirer of yours, Stu. I'm not sure you believe that, but it's true. You're smart and you're stubborn. You have a knack for finding out things."

"So?"

"So I'd like to make a little deal. Pay you whatever is necessary to work on this Gulliver story for me. Track it down. If you find Gulliver —I'm willing to pay a great deal more for the exhibition rights."

"I don't get you."

"What could be plainer? If you could apply your talents to locating these giants, you might well uncover the greatest circus attraction of the century. What do you say?"

Suddenly, Stu felt happy. He stood up, and put his fists on his hips.

"Look, Mr. Scully. I don't know if I can track down this

nutty story. But one thing I do know. If I *did* find Gulliver, the last man on Earth I'd tell is you!"

"Really?"

"Yes, really! I'd sooner do business with a flock of buzzards, Mr. Scully. Understand? I'm going to look for this giant planet. And I hope I find it—just for the pleasure of including you *out*!"

He didn't give Damon Scully a chance for the last word. He stalked out of the office, past the beautiful secretary, past the beautiful receptionist, past the Jupiter Snow Girl exhibit, past the Sex Dreamers of Mercury, and out of the bubble-tent.

The pilot wasn't at the copter when Stu returned. He had him paged, and waited impatiently for his return.

"Wow," he said to Stu as he climbed into the vehicle. "Did you see that Sex Dreamers exhibit?"

"Never mind," Stu grumbled. "Switch on your auxiliary jet. We're going to Wisconsin."

They were twenty miles past the factory sites of Kenosha when they spotted the white, L-shaped building that housed the Biocellular Laboratory of Dr. Alvin Domino. It was almost four in the afternoon when they cut the jet and dropped slowly to the parking lot behind the building. Stu was glad to see their journey end, if only to halt the running monologue of the copter pilot. He would be happy never to hear of Scully's Space Circus again.

Dr. Alvin Domino was waiting at the entrance of the building, but not with open arms. His arms, huge muscular limbs with long hairy fingers, were folded against his burly chest, as if to contain the displeasure he was feeling. He scowled when Stu approached, and led him wordlessly into an inner office.

He seated himself behind a bare metal desk before exploding.

"Now look, Champion! If you're after another story, you can turn right back. I've nothing new to report. And if I had, I wouldn't want your kind of cheap publicity—"

"Hold it!" Stu snapped. "You got me wrong, doc."

"I don't think I have. Our work here deals with a sensitive area of medicine. The wrong kind of newsbreak can do us unlimited harm. That last piece of yours set us back months."

"I'm sorry about that, Dr. Domino. But that's not why I'm here today."

"Then why are you?"

Stu hesitated. Ever since Russ Mackey's visit that morning, he had been debating the answer to this inevitable question. He knew he could direct the interview into several paths, depending upon Domino's mood and his own ingenuity. Now, face to face with Domino's apparent belligerence, he decided the best approach was the boldest.

"I'm here to give you a message," he said carefully.

"Message? From whom?"

"From Victoria."

In the split-second that followed, Stu knew that he had pressed the right button. Domino's dark, brooding face opened with surprise. He gripped the sides of his chair and stiffened his back as if a jolt of electricity had stabbed through the metal tubing.

"How did you know?" he said hoarsely. "How could you?"

Stu, who knew very little, merely looked wise. He lit a cigarette with studied casualness.

"The important thing is," he said delicately, "that I *do*. But you know what they say about a 'little knowledge,' doctor. If I were to print a story on the basis of my meager information, it could do more harm than good. But if I knew all the facts—"

"It's been so long," Domino muttered. "So many years. We were beginning to forget . . ."

"You can see my side of it, can't you?" The reporter spoke earnestly. "I've got a job to do, same as you."

"Yes," Domino said blankly. "But you can't print it. You really can't. You'd ruin the work of almost twenty years . . ."

"I wouldn't want to do that. But I have to *know*, doctor. I can't suppress a story without a good reason. It's against every instinct."

The doctor stood up.

"All right, then," he sighed. "I'll tell you the whole story. Maybe then you'll understand why publicity now could be so disastrous."

"I'm sure you'll be doing the right thing," Stu said, with an inner sigh of his own.

Dr. Domino lead him through the door into the laboratory proper. It was neatly divided into some eight areas, bustling with chemical activities. The white-frocked workers, many of them women, looked at Stu's business suit curiously as he trailed the doctor between the long rows of laboratory benches.

They paused at a door

marked LABORATORY ANIMALS, and Domino said:

"I think this will begin to explain our problems."

They entered. The room was banked high with wire cages, and the small animals behind the bars made a symphony of scurrying, squeaking noises.

Dr. Domino lifted a hand towards the left wall.

"Over there," he said wearily.

Stu looked. It was only one cage, and it covered the entire wall. He stepped back involuntarily when he saw the occupant of the great cage—a guinea pig the size of a large dog.

"The girl's name is Victoria Bray," Dr. Domino said.

Stu Champion sat back in his chair, a silent listener, watching the man's dark eyes.

"Her father was a research worker at the Laboratory. I would guess that our particular specialty interested him because of his daughter's deformity. A childhood accident had deprived her of three fingers and the thumb of her left hand. She was only ten when he came here; she was twenty when she became the subject of our experiments."

The light from the window slanted across the doctor's face, intensifying the gleam of remembrance in his eyes.

"Until that moment, our work had been confined to experimental animals. The greatest proportion of our attempts had been failures; some had resulted in horrible malformations; others in death. Occasionally, some hormone extract would produce a semi-effective result. Once we produced a new tail for one of the mice. We were overjoyed, until the tail continued to grow at an abnormal rate, then overburdened the mouse's blood supply and killed it.

"Our next success came shortly after. We had developed a pituitary serum that actually succeeded in replacing the amputated leg of a guinea pig. We watched the animal for months, waiting for auxiliary effects. There seemed to be none. We had similar results with other animals, until we were convinced that our goal had at last been reached."

The doctor paused. There had been no exhilaration in his announcement.

"Almost a year went by before we experimented with a human subject. We know now that a year was too short a time, but we were intoxicated with our triumphs. We

were possessed, uplifted, exhalted. And no one more so than Douglas Bray, the father of Victoria, who offered us his child with all the holy fervor of a religious fanatic.

"We hesitated at first. Most of us knew the girl—a beautiful young woman, so fresh and engaging that her deformity could subtract nothing from her appeal. But the girl seemed as fanatically eager as her father. So we relented, and Victoria Bray became the first human subject of our serum.

"If you have seen Victoria, then you already know part of her tragic story. Within a month, regrowth was detected. In another new month, new fingers and a thumb appeared, perfectly formed, and, except for minuscular differences, perfect mates to the rest of her hand.

"It seemed like an unqualified success until Victoria herself began to notice the change in her clothing size, the sudden tightness of her finger rings. Three months after the experiment, she had gone from a height of five foot four to six foot one. It was only then that we began to detect size changes in the laboratory animals as well.

"But these changes were trivial compared to the accelerated rate of growth taking place in Victoria's body. The human constitution seemed to react drastically to the regrowth serum. Within six months, Victoria was a pitiful shut-in at her father's house, now a frightening fourteen feet tall. Based on our calculations, her rate of growth was increasing daily. We worked ceaselessly for an antidote, without success. By the time eight months past, Victoria was a giant, perfectly proportioned, but some twenty-five feet high—with the process giving no indication of coming to a halt.

"We were horrified, of course. But here I must admit to another kind of horror which seized us, a more selfish concern. It could not be much longer before Victoria's size became public knowledge; like Alice's nightmare, even her house was becoming too small to contain her. We foresaw a time when she would be the object of general fright and curiosity. Her father knew this, too, and the weight on his mind and body became too much to bear. He died of heart failure. Victoria lifted his poor dead body to her gargantuan tears as if it were a doll."

The doctor bowed his head.

"The horror I speak of is the horror of publicity."

Stu Champion shifted uncomfortably.

"You must understand our viewpoint. The Biocellular Laboratory has been engaged in this work for almost twenty years. Our central ambition has not yet been realized. In the interim, we have given science the keys to advancement in other, related fields. But our efforts rely solely on the charitable contributions of sympathetic individuals. Our work is costly; without this support, it ends. And if public sympathy were turned against us, our project is finished. And we knew this plain fact—if the world were to see the monster we had created in Victoria Bray, our doors would be shut forever by the horror and loathing of public opinion."

He paused, as if waiting for a question. When he found Stu silent, he continued.

"The solution had already occurred to many of us. The Earth could only reject a creature such as Victoria had become. So the Earth must be disowned. Secretly, we engaged the services of a journeyman space captain and his crew, to locate for us a compatible world where Victoria could spend her remaining years. The choice was World 21 in the fourth vector of Antares. Victoria was almost full grown—some eighty-five feet—when we made this sad voyage, providing her with every means of survival we could manage.

"That was almost six years ago. During that time, myself or some member of the laboratory has visited the poor creature some four or five times. It's almost three years since I saw her last. She lives in dreadful loneliness on that godforsaken planet, a forgotten martyr to science . . ." He blew his nose harshly. "Since that time, we have been trying to utilize the serum for other purposes. We have brought it to such a state of perfection that we can create such giant specimens as you saw within a week. Perhaps we will have the means for increasing the yeild of man's food animals. We are not certain of its potential; we are still too concerned with attaining our original goal."

"And what about an antidote?" Stu said.

The doctor shook his head. "We have tried."

After a silent moment, Stu got to his feet.

"Thanks for being so frank with me," he said. "I won't

promise to print nothing at all of what you've told me, Dr. Domino. But I promise not to release a word that could harm the laboratory. I'll see that you see everything I intend to print."

"I don't suppose I can expect more than that," Domino sighed. "The press," he added wryly, "seems to have more privileges than science. But I plead with you to remember this promise, Mr. Champion."

"I'll remember," Stu said.

Within a month, the sizeable resources of the Universal Press Service provided Stuart Champion with the newest in photon-powered star ships, a six-man vessel called the *Newshawk.*

The captain, a jovial, thick-shouldered man named Ethan McCracken, spent several hours with Stu and the navigator, a blue-bearded young man named Stern. But Stu Champion wasn't revealing their final destination. They had to be satisfied with plotting the course in the general vicinity of Antares' fourth vector.

There were few personal arrangements for Stu before the departure date. A bachelor, with no family and surprisingly few close friends, he waited eagerly for the space voyage. It would be his first out of the solar system, and the reward that awaited its conclusion excited him.

In the first few days of the journey, he sensed the grumbling attitude of the five-man crew. Captain McCracken maintained his jovial air, but the navigator and the rest seemed openly disgruntled about their assignment. McCracken laughed off the complaint when Stu approached him with it.

"They're natural surly grumblers," he said cheerfully. "All this 'secret destination' stuff never sits well with them. Don't let it bother you, my friend."

Stu made the explanation do, but he was uncomfortable for the rest of the voyage. When they made the dimensional jump that brought them into the Antares system, he was glad to remove the mystery that shrouded the flight by announcing the exact destination. It didn't improve the nature of the crew, but Captain McCracken chuckled with satisfaction, and set to work plotting the route to World 21 with his navigator.

Forty-eight days after blast-off, the speck that was to become World 21 appeared in their viewscope.

It was a pale, greenish

speck, and the faint path of two tiny satellites could be observed swinging in an erratic orbit around the planet.

Within thirty hours, the speck was a fuzzy, glowing ball, delicately green in color, its markings clearly delineating its seas and mountains and land areas, its vast, arid stretches of volcanic soil, blistered with craters.

In the space of another Earth day, the ship was descending towards the surface of the hospitable world that was Victoria Bray's home.

Under McCracken's direction they left the ship in space gear, despite the benevolent atmosphere recorded on the *Newshawk's* telemeters.

"Standard precaution," he told Stu with a grin. "I've seen these 'friendly' atmospheres turn into poison without warning. Better go slow, Mr. Champion."

The terrain gave beneath their booted feet like sponge, and the planet's light gravitational pull sent them gliding into the air with every step. The sun over their heads was smaller than the star of Earth, but it was warm and brilliant. The sky was cloudless.

They set to work creating the usual encampment of the space explorer, a bivouac of supplies and weapons forming a ring around the ship, a temporary home and fortress. Later, they would widen the circle and explore the terrain for important or curious specimens.

But Stu Champion's mind was concerned with only one of the planet's features.

But did it exist?

It was dawn before he knew.

He had spent the night inside the ship, preferring the leathery comfort of the bunk to the sleeping bags affected by the crew. Stern, the navigator, was standing guard duty, and it was the sound of his rifle, cracking through the silence of the dawn outside, that brought Stu Champion to his feet.

He rushed outside and found the crew alerted, with their own weapons drawn. He followed the direction of their eyes, and knew that Dr. Alvin Domino had told him the truth.

Over a rocky escarpment to the east, the small hot sun of World 21 beginning to ascend behind it, was the peak of a golden mountain.

There was a stirring around its edges, as of tiny delicate trees swaying in the morning breeze.

Then the mountain grew, rising slowly over the cliff, until the gargantuan blue eyes of Victoria Bray were revealed, peering in curiosity and fright at her tiny visitors.

"Don't!"

Stu Champion's shout brought Stern's rifle down.

"What *is* it?" The navigator's face was gray, but the captain's chuckle brought color into his cheeks.

"What's the matter, Ernie? Don't you recognize a woman when you see one?" He chuckled again, but he brought his own rifle into firing position. "I'll admit she's a mite bigger than the gals back home . . .".

Stu stepped in front of them, signalling to the great blue orbs still peering at them. He removed his space helmet, despite McCracken's warning, and cupped his hands over his mouth.

"It's all right!" he cried. "We're friends! We're friends, Victoria!"

The sound of the girl's name in the still air reacted on them all. Captain McCracken and his navigator exchanged surprised glances, and the girl's outsize eyes blinked suddenly. Her head began to rise above the horizon, until it blocked the small sun ascending behind her, casting a long shadow on the six men and their space vessel. Her elbows appeared next, and Stu realized that she had been crouching over the mountain, and was raising herself to her full height.

And an impressive height it was—at least a hundred feet over the pitted terrain of the planet. There were some two or three miles separating the giantess and the ship; the distance gave them a chance to study her as she rose to her feet.

She was a beauty, all right, by anybody's standards. They stood gaping at her, awed by both the superb contours of her body and by her incredible size. The sun etched her figure sharply against the morning sky. She was something unreal, something out of an alien dream, yet something as real and desirable as a man could know. . . .

"She's coming for us!" It was a shriek from the first engineer. Stu whirled towards him.

"Take it easy! She's harmless—"

But the fear was mounting. The giantess was striding towards them, with hesitant steps, but with steps that covered acres. She grew larger in their sight, and the crew of the *Newshawk* began

edging back towards the ship.

"She could squash us," Stern said quietly. "Like bugs—"

"I said take it easy!" Stu took a bold step forward. "She's not hostile, I tell you. She's more afraid than any of us."

But even the captain was keeping his rifle level.

Then Stern fired again.

"No!" Stu shouted.

The damage had been done. The pressure bullet struck the giantess just above the knee cap. She cried out and clapped her hand over the tiny wound, and her face darkened with surprise and anger. Her steps quickened towards them.

"Look out!" the engineer said. "She's after us!"

It was a panic signal. He broke for the ship, scrambling to climb the ladder. The other crewmen followed hastily, despite Stu's urgent commands to hold their ground. McCracken was the last to make the climb.

"Come back!" Stu said. "She's only frightened. She won't harm us!"

McCracken paused at the top of the ship's ladder. "Better come back with us, Mr. Champion. That gal means to do mischief."

"No! You've got to let me talk to her!"

"I'm not risking my ship and crew, Mr. Champion. I'm taking the *Newshawk* off this place."

"You can't leave. You've got your orders!"

"My orders don't compel me to endanger my ship. That woman can stomp on us, Mr. Champion; we wouldn't have a chance. Best thing to do is blast off. You coming along?"

Stu looked back over his shoulder. The girl was standing still now, watching them.

"No," he said.

"Then we leave without you. I'll send a patrol ship here if you want—"

"You can't do that. You mustn't tell anyone."

"Suit yourself, Mr. Champion." He grinned suddenly. "It's not a bad place to visit. But I'd hate to be stuck here."

Then the door clanged behind him.

A moment later, the *Newshawk* engines were whining the preamble to blast-off, and Stu Champion ran with sinking heart to the safety of a nearby crater.

Then the rockets roared, and the *Newshawk* trembled and rose into the sky.

He looked towards the stilled giantess, whose eyes were turned to the ascending ves-

sel as it disappeared from sight. She looked baffled, uncertain.

Then Stu came forward again.

"Victoria!" he cried.

She turned her gargantuan eyes towards him, her brow furrowed with puzzlement. Then, carefully, she took ten steps in his direction, and slowly went to her knees.

"Who are you?" she said, in a controlled whisper. Yet the voice was stentorian.

Stu shouted his reply.

"My name is Stuart Champion. I'm a friend. Dr. Domino sent me—"

She smiled suddenly, clapping her enormous hands together in a girlish gesture of delight. The sound she made echoed sharply over the mountaintops.

"Dr. Domino! How wonderful! It's been so long—" Then several feet of ridges appeared in her forehead. "But your ship. It's left without you!"

"I know," Stu said. "It doesn't matter, Victoria. I've —I've come to stay with you a while."

"To stay?" The puzzlement remained on her face. Then a thought seemed to cross her mind, and her eyes widened. "Are you—did the laboratory—"

"No, no!" Stu said hastily. "Nothing like that. I'm just here to keep you company, to see how you're getting along. Do you mind?"

"Mind?" Even now, with the giant face only yards away, the girl seemed beautiful. It was made even lovelier by the bright glow of pleasure that suffused it. "Why should I mind? It's so lonely for me here—you must know that—"

"Yes," Stu said uncomfortably. "Yes, of course. Victoria, I want to be your friend. I want you to tell me everything—about how you live here, and what your problems are, and what you think about. Will you do that?"

"Of course!"

"You've had visitors before, Victoria. How did they —I mean—" Stu wiped his moist brow. "How did they manage to get around this place? How did they keep up with you?"

The girl laughed. "Don't worry. I won't have to carry you."

She clambered to her feet, and the ground beneath Stu shivered.

"I'll be back," she promised.

He watched her retreat back towards the mountain. When she was out of sight, he

dropped to the cool, gritty loam of the planet, and allowed the tension of the past hour to tremble through his body. By the time the giantess returned, he was calmer.

She was carrying something, a toy in her hands.

"Here," she said happily. "Dr. Domino brought it with him on his last trip."

She set the object in front of him, and the toy suddenly became a trim, ruggedly built, two-bladed copter.

"You *can* fly it, can't you?"

"Yes," Stu said. "I can manage it."

He climbed into the cockpit and strapped the safety belt around his middle. He checked the guages and found the ship well fueled. Then he started the engine, and coaxed the copter several feet off the ground.

"Where to?" he shouted.

"Follow me!" Virginia Bray said joyfully.

It was an unforgettable ride.

Stu kept the copter just behind the giantess as she strode nimbly towards their destination. He clocked her groundspeed at better than two hundred miles an hour. Every now and then, she'd look back over her shoulder at the little whirring object behind her, and she would laugh happily. Once, when Stu steered the small craft close to the Niagara of blonde hair that spilled over her back, she smiled playfully and blew a light gust of breath at the rotors, sending the copter into a sideslip. It was only a small pleasantry on her part, but Stu kept a respectful distance from Victoria after that.

Beyond the mountains, they came to Victoria's home.

From a distance, it seemed nothing more than a crude metal structure of almost primitive simplicity, a stolid square building without ornamentation. Half a mile beyond it was another, smaller structure of the same drab composition, but windowless. To the left was a curious mound of curved, transparent plastic, like an endless tunnel stretching towards the horizon.

But when Stu Champion dropped the copter to the ground, Victoria's living quarters loomed before him like the mightiest of fortresses ever built on Earth.

"I don't spend much time here," the girl told him as he left the ship. "Dr. Domino and the others built it for me. But I don't need it as shelter; the weather rarely changes

here. And it's sort of—" the giant features became wistful —"sort of dreary. They did the best they could, but still—"

She entered through the massive doorway. The structure had been divided into three areas, comprising living, dining, and sleeping quarters. The furniture was rudimentary, and cast in the same drab metallic material in which the house had been built. It must have been a monstrous chore for Dr. Domino and the others to construct this incredible dwelling-place, but all their dedicated efforts had made a cheerless home for the pitiful giant they were abandoning. It was depressing.

Stu made the long walk from room to room, until he was stopped by the first sign of color. It was an unframed canvas some twenty-feet square, hung over the fantastic altar that served as Victoria's bed. The painting was of an Earth scene, the colors strangely muted and crude, but the intensity of the images was almost shockingly vivid and compelling.

"I painted that," the giantess said, shyness in her booming voice. "There are clays in some of the craters, with strange colors. I—I learned to mix them. It gave me something to do."

"It's wonderful," Stu said. "Seriously, Victoria, it's very good." He turned to look at her, but found himself craning to catch her eyes. She realized what was happening, and backed away to give him more normal vision.

"What are those other two buildings?" Stu asked. "The smaller place out in back, and that plastic tunnel?"

"The smaller building is a power plant. It supplies all my electrical power, and runs the servo-mechanism for the hydroponic greenhouse."

"Greenhouse? Is that what the tunnel is?"

"Yes. Dr. Domino installed it. It gives me a constant supply of fruits and vegetables—gigantic specimens by Earth standards, but it takes quite a lot to satisfy my appetite."

"Is that all you eat?"

"I'm afraid so. I've become an involuntary vegetarian. But it's not so bad. There are worse things . . ." She looked towards the painting.

They toured the greenhouse and the power plant, and Stu found his admiration for Dr. Domino increasing with every step of the inspection.

"What a job! It must have cost plenty—"

"I know it did. It cost the laboratory so much of the money they needed so desperately. But Dr. Domino felt so obligated to do all this. He's a wonderful man . . ."

"What's that over there?" Stu pointed toward the west, past the greenhouse, at an enormous hill of turned earth. A slab of metal protruded from one end, and there were markings on its face. "It looks like—"

"It is," Victoria said. "It's a grave. It's Koko's grave."

"Koko?"

"A dog. He was one of the experimental animals, treated with the same serum that—He was a giant, too. I brought him with me here, for company. But when he reached his full size, he wasn't to be trusted anymore. He—he almost killed one of the laboratory people when they landed here three years ago. He was just being playful, but—"

Suddenly, Stu Champion realized that Victoria Bray was about to cry. Women's tears had never particularly troubled him before, but Victoria was no ordinary woman.

"Now, listen," he said feebly.

But it was too late. A stentorian sob left her throat, and she put her hands over her face. But as if she realized how grotesque her tears would appear to the tiny creature who watched her, she ran off in tremendous strides, back to the house.

Stu Champion's visit to World 21 lasted forty-five of the planet's brief, sunny days —a mere three weeks by Earth reckoning. In that short period, he learned enough about Victoria Bray and her strange fate to write a column a day for the next newspaper year.

He learned about her first desolate months on the barren world, months in which suicidal despair and the will to live fought a battle within her overgrown body.

He listened, with amazement, to the story of Victoria's self-education program —a program of reading and study which had enabled her to become expert in subjects few women of any size had mastered. She had learned four languages, on a world where words were unspoken. She had gathered enough electronic knowledge to construct a gargantuan sound system, with parts specially created for her on Earth, with which her giant ears could listen to taped recordings of

the finest Earth music. (She played a Beethoven symphony for Stu one evening, and the sound deafened him for hours afterward.) She was well-versed in the physical sciences, and her understanding of the mechanisms which gave her light and power, and supplied her with food, was extraordinary. She had digested an Everest of great literature, specially printed in foot-high letters, and poetry came as easily to her thoughts as prose.

She was a freak. She was a phenomenon. She was an object of curiosity and fascination. She would make wonderful copy for his column.

But Stu Champion was troubled. He began to realize that Victoria Bray was a woman, too.

His visit to World 21 had the strange, unearthly qualities of a dream. And oddly enough, it ended with a dream.

He dreamt that he was back behind the desk in the Universal Press Service Building, busily pounding the typewriter to meet an onrushing deadline. Claire, his owl-eyed secretary interrupted, and the expression of her face announced some unusual visitor.

He rose from his chair, facing the doorway. The vision that entered was surrounded by haze, yet sharply etched as if by strong sunlight.

"Victoria!" he cried.

She floated towards him, her arms outstretched, her golden hair flowing behind her. She came to him soundlessly, her lips parted.

"Stu," she said. "I'm all right now, Stu! Dr. Domino found the antidote. Oh, Stu . . ."

The desk, the debris of papers, the demanding deadlines, the confining walls of the office disappeared. They were on a grassy plain, rimmed by tall green trees, the sky a brilliant blue overhead. Victoria Bray was in his arms, her golden head against his shoulder, her small, delicate fingers stroking his cheek.

"I'm willing to pay a great deal," said a voice. "For the exhibition rights . . ."

It was Damon Scully, and he was chuckling.

Stu broke the embrace. "Get out of here, Scully!"

"Now really, old man—"

"Stu!" Victoria clung to him, frightened by the tall, sinister figure approaching them. "Stu, what is it? What does he want?"

"She'll make a wonderful

exhibit," Scully said. "Come in and Kill the Giant. Razor Sharp Swords Provided Free. Watch the Giant Shed Enormous, Feminine Tears. Safe Enough for Children . . ."

"Get away from here!"

But it was no longer Damon Scully advancing upon them. It was a pudgy tourist, with portable radio, binoculars, and camera swinging from straps around his neck. He was licking his lips, and his face was damp with sweat, and there was a gleaming sword in his right hand. . . .

"No! Stop!" Stu Champion screamed.

But the blade was descending in a glittering arc, and Victoria was screaming, screaming. . . .

"Stu! Stu!"

Half in and half out of his dream, Stu Champion lifted his head.

"Stu! Come quickly!"

He jumped to his feet, following the booming sound of Victoria's voice.

"What is it? What's happened?"

"A ship!" She was pointing a finger over the mountaintop. "A ship's landed!"

He ran for the copter, and started the blades whining. Victoria directed him to the site of the landing, some forty miles from her living quarters.

"It's the *Newshawk*!"

And that was the way Stu Champion's visit ended, with cheerful halloos from Captain Ethan McCracken, and a tearful farewell from the goddess of World 21.

"I'll be back, Victoria. Do you understand? I promise to come back."

"Will you really, Stu?" A pool of glistening moisture flooded the corners of her eyes.

"Yes! But I must go back now. There's a lot I have to do. I want to see if I can help you—"

Then he was climbing aboard the star ship, behind the broad back of the captain.

"Been some changes since our last trip," McCracken chuckled as they entered the ship. "Had to get me a whole new crew. Wouldn't come back for love or money . . ."

Stu Champion turned in the direction of McCracken's smiling eyes. A thin, white-haired man looked up from the viewport and grinned engagingly at him.

"I wouldn't have missed this for the world," he said. "Thanks for the opportunity, Stu."

It was Damon Scully.

It was some time before Stu Champion could bring the anger in his voice under control. Damon Scully filled the gap by saying:

"Certainly owe you a debt of gratitude, Stu. You've really hit on something—big." He laughed softly.

"How did you get here, Scully? This is a UPS ship."

"I'm afraid you're wrong. The *Newshawk* is a journeyman, available to anyone with the price. UPS doesn't have control over it. Right, Captain?"

McCracken grinned. "That is right, sir."

Stu glared at him. "And no control over your tongue, either."

"Let's not be too high-minded," Scully said. "If you must know, Captain McCracken and myself have had an understanding about this expedition from the beginning. It's strictly business, Stu. You can appreciate that."

Stu turned towards the viewport, his cheeks burning. He watched the greenish globe of World 21 grow smaller, then he came back wearily to Damon Scully's side.

"Listen, Scully. You may as well know the truth. That's not Gulliver down there. The girl is from Earth; her name is Victoria Bray—"

"And a lovely thing she is," Scully answered. "Spare yourself the trouble, old man. Once I was able to trace you here, it was simple to get the rest of the story. I know all about our giantess, and Dr. Domino. But that doesn't mean I've lost interest."

"What do you mean? If you think you'll ever get Victoria into that freak show of yours, you're mistaken!"

"Really? You seem to know a lot about—Victoria. But look at it this way, Stu. The poor child's spent six lonely years on that miserable planet. Do you think she'd pass up the opportunity to return to Earth?"

"Yes! If it meant coming back as a monster—a circus spectacle. She'd never consent to it!"

"Is that what Dr. Domino says?"

"That's what I say. And as for Domino, she wouldn't hurt him for the world. That's another reason she won't return to Earth."

Scully smiled, and placed a thin hand on Stu's shoulder.

"I've always said you were a bright lad, Stu. You're right, of course. That thing—I mean Victoria, would never

consent to such foolishness. I've known that all along."

Stu frowned. "I don't get it. If you knew it, why did you make this trip?"

"Oh, curiosity, I guess. You see, Stu, that's one of the reasons for my success. I'm as curious as any one of the rubbernecks who visit Scully's Space Circus. Maybe more so. That's why I know how to please them. I just wanted to see this mile-high woman for myself."

"And you'll leave her alone?"

"That's an odd question to ask me. After all, you're the famous columnist. If you write up her story, there won't *be* any leaving her alone. Every space bum in the universe will be paying her a call."

"I've thought of that," Stu said tightly. "That's why I'm not writing the story . . ."

His answer seemed to amuse Scully, who chuckled and then fell silent. The silence was maintained until the *Newshawk* was slipping into the orbit of the planet Earth.

It was ten days after Stu's return to work at the UPS building before Volkman, the managing director, started asking questions.

Stu was snugly ensconced behind the paper fortress of his desk, lackadaisically tapping out a gossip column for the next editions, when Volkman came stomping into his office.

"All right," he growled. "If the mountain won't come to Mohammed—" He dropped his bulky body into a chair and scraped it forward to thrust his massive chin towards the reporter.

"Hi," Stu said carelessly. "Didn't know you were in town, Mr. Volkman."

"You knew damn well I was in town. I've been sitting upstairs for almost two weeks, waiting for some good copy on Gulliver. But all I've seen is a bunch of your usual drivel. Whatcha doing, Champion? Saving it up?"

Stu locked his hands under his chin. "Nope. Nothing to save up, Mr. Volkman. Story turned out to be a dud."

"Don't give me that! You were so positive, couple of months ago. That's why I went out on a limb for you, Champion. That's why I okayed that fancy trip of yours. You know what it cost UPS?"

"I've seen the cost sheet."

Volkman slammed a palm on the desk. "Then let's have some good copy! Did you find Gulliver or didn't you?"

"No."

"Then what did you find?"

"Nothing."

"What?"

"It was all a mistake, Mr. Volkman. There's a gal on World 21, all right. But she's not really a giant. Oh, she's a little bigger than most dames, maybe." Stu kept his eyes on the floor. "But nothing special, nothing to write about."

Volkman's face started turning color.

"You're hiding something, Champion! You promised me a big newsbreak, and now you won't even talk about it! Something smells bad, Champion!"

"I tell you there's no story! The gal is perfectly normal. She's up there for—scientific purposes." He knew it sounded lame.

Volkman got up, his face mottled, his lips white. "Okay, pal. Have it your way. But I'm going to sit up in that office for another week, and I'm going to be watching your output. And if something doesn't break through on this giant story—you can start watching the want ads."

When Volkman left, Stu sighed and flipped the intercom switch. As usual, it was on the blink.

"Claire!"

His secretary scurried in. "Yes, Mr. Champion?"

"Requisition me a copter. For this afternoon."

"Yes, sir. Where to, Mr. Champion?"

"Wisconsin. Put in a call to the Biocellular Lab and tell Dr. Domino I'm on my way out. Okay?"

"Yes, sir."

She returned a few moments later, and the look on her owlish face was slightly baffled.

"He said he'd be expecting you, Mr. Champion. The only thing is—he sounded *angry*."

Stu frowned. "Everybody's angry today. Must be the weather." She thought there could be no other cause.

Stu arrived at the Biocellular Laboratory only three hours from the time of his secretary's phone call. But Dr. Alvin Domino seemed to have maintained the angry mood that Claire had reported. His dark face was cloudier than usual, and he didn't speak until they were alone in the inner office.

"All right," he said crisply. "Let's have it."

"Look, Dr. Domino. I don't know what's upset you, but I'm here in good faith."

"You've been to 21, haven't you?"

"Yes. I've been there. And I've seen Victoria."

The doctor's features softened. "How—how is she?"

"Well as you might expect. It's a hell of a situation that kid is in. But I guess you know that."

"I know it," Domino snapped. "I can't look at the stars any more without feeling the pangs of guilty conscience. You don't have to spell it out for me, Mr. Champion."

"I didn't come for that. I came to ask for help."

"Help? What kind of help?"

"For her, for Victoria. For some solution to this thing—"

"We've been all through that."

"Maybe not enough. Maybe you haven't really tried. That girl can't survive out there, despite all your fancy servomechanisms. One of these days—"

"That's enough!" Domino said angrily. "What gives you the right to plead her case? Victoria's nothing more than a story to you, Champion. Bread and butter! Circulation!"

"That's not true! I haven't written a word about my trip, and I don't intend to. Publicity could kill her—"

"Publicity *will* kill her," Domino said gratingly. "And you can share the blame!"

Stu blinked. "What are you talking about?"

"No use acting innocent, Champion. Of course you didn't write the story. You had a better deal, didn't you?"

"I don't know what you mean!"

"Then suppose I show you?" Domino flicked the intercom switch. "Miss Forbes—bring me Scully's circular."

"Scully!"

"Yes. Mr. Damon Scully—a friend of yours, I believe." His anger was evident.

"You're dead wrong! I don't have anything to do with that snake!"

Miss Forbes was prompt. Domino passed the circular over to Stu's waiting hand, and watched his face as he scanned it.

It read:

Damon Scully's
Space Circus Announces
The Greatest Attraction
of Modern Times
VICTORIA
The Giant Goddess
of World 21
A Hundred Feet of
Spectacular Pulchritude
Special Excursion Trips
Starting Sept. 1

There was more descriptive copy, but Stu Champion stopper reading. He crumpled the

paper in his hand, and glared at the doctor.

"You're wrong!" he said hoarsely. "I had nothing to do with this. It's the last thing in the world I wanted."

Domino sighed, with great fatigue. "It doesn't really matter now. The damage is done . . ."

"We have to do something! We have to stop him!"

"Stop him? How? In a little over a month, he'll start his excursion trips. There'll be a carnival on World 21 in a month. And God knows what will happen to Victoria." His despair was obvious.

"Couldn't we get her off the planet?"

"It took us six months to find World 21, six more to make it livable for Victoria. There's no time, no time—"

"But this will kill her!"

Domino shrugged. "When they come to gape and to laugh, she won't be responsible for her actions. Just like Koko—"

"Koko?"

"A harmless puppy. But when grown to giant's size—a killer. It can happen to Victoria, too. When they begin to plague her, she'll defend herself. Someone will be hurt. And then—"

The two men sat silent for a while, each pondering the dreadful possibilities of the situation.

Then Stu Champion spoke.

"Doctor—how did you get Victoria to 21?"

"We used a star ship that was employed in building the artificial satellites in Andromeda. It was a tremendous vessel, with great capacity, designed to open completely down the side of its hold, so that Victoria could leave the ship without making it necessary to destroy it."

"Is that ship still available?"

"Why—I imagine so."

Stu chewed his lip, before meeting Dr. Domino's now-curious gaze.

"I want you to do something for me, Doctor. Something I've been thinking about for some time."

"And what's that?"

"I want you to create another giant."

The space lanes of World 21 were suddenly heavy with unaccustomed traffic.

In the middle of Earth's August, four supply ships of Damon Scully's Space Circus landed within a mile of the home of Victoria Bray. Damon Scully himself supervised the unloading of the odd paraphernalia which was to become a new circus grounds.

Prefabricated hotel quarters were erected, refreshment stands, souvenir concessions, business offices. Enormous signs and pennants were raised, announcing the great attraction of World 21. And after all the gay carnival trappings were arranged to Damon Scully's satisfaction, a grim battery of artillery, equipped to fire atomic shells, was stationed at the site.

It was only after these defensive preparations were completed that Damon Scully, with portable loudspeaker equipment strapped around his shoulders, began the long walk to the doorway of Victoria Bray's home.

He flicked a switch, and spoke soothingly into the microphone at his lips. His pleasant voice, magnified to a volume that made the ground quiver, said:

"Victoria! Victoria Bray! This is Damon Scully speaking."

There was no answer from the towering metal edifice.

"There's no need to be frightened, Victoria. We haven't come to harm you. I'd like to talk things over."

Silence.

"Come out where we can see you, Victoria. You can't stay in there forever. We don't wish to resort to anything drastic."

Still no reply.

Scully frowned, and looked over his shoulder at the crewmen who were watching him anxiously. Then his voice hardened.

"You don't seem to understand the circumstances, Victoria. If necessary, we'll shut off your power supply. My men are already in the powerhouse, awaiting my signal. We can stop that pretty greenhouse of yours, my dear. Think of all those magnificent plants, withering on the vine. You'll be a mighty hungry young lady without them. Think that over."

He waited a moment, and then gestured towards the powerhouse. A moment later, the slight hum that pervaded the air stopped abruptly.

"Hear that, Victoria? That silence means your power is off. You'll starve without it. Now be sensible, and come out where we can talk."

Scully waited, rocking confidently on his heels, knowing that he had played his trump.

Then the massive door was swinging open.

The sight of its movement sent the men behind Scully hurrying towards the comforting shadows of the atomic cannon. But Damon Scully

held his ground, his hands on his hips.

Then the giant emerged.

A gasp of concerted awe rose from the tiny figures that surrounded the house. But it was caused by more than the size of the human who came into view.

The giant was a man.

Damon Scully stood stunned.

"All right, Scully!" The voice boomed towards them. "You can do your talking to me."

The circus man recovered his speech.

"Champion! What the hell—"

"I said talk, little man!" The awesome figure moved forward, and the movement was too much even for Scully's bravado. He joined his crewmen at the artillery. Then, as if gathering courage once more, he halted his backward progress, and forced himself to laugh into the microphone.

"This is wonderful!" he said. "Marvelous! My old friend, Stu!"

"I said talk, Scully! Make your little speech. Then take yourself and the rest of your vultures off this planet!"

"What made you do it, Stu? Did you fall for our dear little Victoria? Is that it?"

"I won't wait forever, Scully."

"No, no. Of course not. But you'll have to admit, old man—it's a shock to see you." He nodded his head towards a member of his crew, keeping his eyes fixed on the giant face. "Brannigan! Better get the men working on those posters. Seems we have a *double* attraction on World 21. Not just one giant—but two! What an exhibit! The Brobdingnagian Lovers of World 21!"

Stu Champion's rage was giant-size, too. He cursed aloud, and lifted one foot from the ground as if to stamp out this insect-size menace. Scully's aplomb deserted him, and he ran to safety. When he spoke again, his voice was naked with purpose.

"That's enough of that, Champion! One more trick like that and we fire! These are atomic cannon, my friend. They're giant-killers!"

"Get off the planet!" Stu cried. "You have no right here!"

"Haven't I? Your size hasn't increased your mental powers, friend. You and Victoria are the trespassers here. World 21 has been purchased by my corporation, as of

August One. Do you think the Interstellar Police would blame me for killing a trespasser? Then think again, Champion."

"I don't believe you!"

"Ah, but you do. You know me too well. Your friend Domino never went so far as to take legal possession of this world from the government interstellar land office. But I have. So watch yourself, Stu—or we'll be digging enormous graves."

Stu glared helplessly at the tiny figures at his feet. Then he turned back to the house.

"You can't hide forever!" Scully shrieked. "Your power is off. You'll starve—both of you. Be smart, Champion. Cooperate—"

"Go to blazes!"

Victoria was waiting for him, sitting on the edge of the bed with her face in her hands.

He looked around the room that had once appeared so monstrously huge to him, and knew now how cramped and bare it had been for the woman who made it her home.

He approached her slowly, marveling again at how small and fragile she really was. He put an arm about her shoulder, and her blonde head moved to rest against his chest.

"What's going to happen to us?" she said.

"I don't know," he said bitterly. "Those are small people out there—smaller than you ever were. Sooner or later, they'll leave us alone."

He stroked her hair, not believing his own words. Scully would leave them alone only when the last exhibition dollar had been wrung from the last tourist.

"We'll have to do as he says," the girl whispered. "We'll have to, Stu. We can't live without the power supply."

"I know. We'll do as they want, Victoria. But that doesn't mean we're giving up. If I can get to that toy artillery of theirs—"

"No, Stu! They'll kill you!"

He smiled and put out his hand.

"Come on, Goddess. Let's go outside."

He put his arm around her, and they pushed open the great door.

"Magnificent!" Scully cried gleefully. "Wonderful! The greatest love affair in the universe. The—"

He was saying something else into the portable microphone, but no one could hear it. For suddenly, his words

were drowned in a roar of sound that shook the ground beneath their feet—sound so violent that its impact made fissures appear on the dry hard surface of World 21. And, incredibly, the sound was increasing—an onslaught of noise that made the little men clap hands to ears and scream involuntarily.

Victoria clung to Stu's arm. "Stu—what is it?"

"A ship," he whispered, eyes on the sky. "A ship, Victoria—"

It *was* a ship—and the angry, enveloping roar was nothing more than the braking of its rockets as it settled heavily on the small planet. But it was a ship like none ever launched from Earth, a gondola-shaped vessel of blinding whiteness, a vessel of such great immensity that the Scully supply fleet was dwarfed to the size of space rafts.

"Man the artillery!" Damon Scully shouted.

No one heard the command. The knot of crewmen gathered around the weapons tightened, watching the fantastic gondola complete its landing, wondering what sort of alien creatures would emerge.

Their answer came quickly. A panel slid open, and a skyscraper-tall ladder made contact with the ground beneath.

Then the occupants climbed out.

There were two of them.

They were humanoid, male, clothed in close-fitting garments of dull brown. Their hair was white and shoulder-length, and their eyes were pentratingly black and lustrous.

The eyes moved slowly across the landscape of World 21, until they met the eyes of Stu Champion and Victoria Bray—at their own level.

Then the giants smiled.

"Who are you?" Damon Scully shrieked into the loudspeaker. "Did Domino send you?"

They looked down at the circus man, and turned to each other. There was an exchange of whispers, and then the first giant spoke.

"English?" he said cordially.

"American!" Scully said.

"I referred to your language," the giant answered softly. "I am Analta, and this is my brother Doati. We will converse with you in English, unless you desire otherwise."

"Who are you? Where do you come from?"

"We are merely visitors, from a galaxy we call Inolani, and a world which I believe

you have named—" He rubbed his great jaw and grinned. "Gulliver."

"Gulliver!"

"This is our first contact with the people of Earth, but we know a great deal of your civilization. We have listened to your radio messages, and obtained knowledge of your languages. But we have been reluctant to bring our two cultures together, despite the evolutionary traits we seem to share. You see—there's rather a difference in our size."

His grin widened, and he turned to his brother. The second giant stepped forward, his eyes on Stu and Victoria.

"Our government sent us on this expedition," he said, in a voice even gentler than the first speaker. "Recently, we heard rumors concerning a young woman—" he nodded courteously towards Victoria —"who had been stranded on a world in an uncharted system. A young woman whose size made her an oddity in the eyes of the Earth people. I see we were not misinformed."

"But what do you want?" Scully said.

"We came on a mission of mercy," Analta explained. "To rescue what we believed was one of our own kind. Now," he chuckled, "there seem to be two."

Stu Champion stepped forward.

"We are not from your world, Analta. We are freaks —man-created giants."

"Yes," Analta said tonelessly.

"Then you can leave," Scully said. "There's no mission of mercy here—"

"Isn't there?" Doati said. Slowly, his gaze wandered over the carnival trappings ringing Victoria's home. His eyes rested on the atomic cannon.

"No!" Scully shouted. "Go back to your own world. We have business here."

"Ah, yes," Antalta said. "I have heard of business."

Doati looked again towards Stu and the girl.

"Our world is a good world," he said. "Our hills are green and our soil is fertile. Our science is designed for the good of all our people, and we no longer know war."

Stu stared at him. "Why do you tell us this?"

Doati shrugged. "My brother and I—we were despatched as messengers of mercy. If there is help that can be extended here, we do not wish to fail our mission."

Analta joined him. "Doati

speaks well of our world, but we are not paradise. There is sometimes enmity and conflict, despite our aversion to war. We have not conquered all disease nor controlled all evil emotions. But it is a good world—an exceptionally good world—for giants."

"Stu," Victoria whispered. "Stu, do you know what he's saying?"

"Will you take us?" Stu Champion asked. "Will you bring us to your planet?" His voice was anxious.

"If this is your wish," Analta said. "We would be very happy. There is much we can learn from each other . . ."

"Brannigan! Mitchell! Dover!" Damon Scully was shouting. "Artillery positions!"

There was a scuffle of tiny figures on the planet's surface, as Scully's crewmen took positions behind the minuscule weapons with their giant-size threat.

"These are atomic cannon, Analta," Scully said. "Do you know what that means?"

Analta frowned. "Yes. What is your intention?"

"Our intention is simple. We wish to be left alone."

"Very well," Doati smiled. "We have not come for aggressive purposes. We will leave at once—if our friends are ready."

"Your friends aren't ready! Your friends are staying here!"

"But if they wish to leave—"

"They don't have anything to say about it! Now return to your ship. We mean business!"

"Business," Analta repeated softly. "What a useful word!"

"We have a saying on Earth, Analta. The bigger they are—"

"Of course," Doati said. "We are not authorized to interfere in local matters. But I believe you are making a mistake."

"I'll worry about the mistake," Scully said. "This planet is private property, authorized by the government of Earth. Your very presence here could constitute an illegal invasion. If you don't want trouble between our worlds—get out now!"

Analta sighed, and conferred briefly with his brother.

"Very well," he said. "I am sorry, my friends."

Something dropped from his great hands. Something round and brilliant, many-faced and sparkling like a

diamond of boulder size. It landed soundlessly on the earth before the little figures.

"What is that?" Scully said.

"It's a gift," Analta said gently.

Scully stared at it, suddenly frozen in his tracks. He tried to speak into the microphone, but the words were blocked in his throat. With great effort, he turned to the crewmen behind him, and saw their own eyes fixed on the huge, glittering stone.

Then he forced a cry.

"It's a trick! A trick! Artillery—artillery—"

But the men poised at the hair-triggers of the atomic cannon were immobile. Their eyes widened as they stared at the corruscating gem. They stood rigid as statues, absorbed, hypnotized.

"Now," Analta said quietly, "I think we may go. Will you climb aboard, my friends?"

Stu Champion yanked his eyes from the object on the ground, and pulled Victoria with him to the gondola-ship.

"What is it?" Stu asked.

"We have done them no harm," Doati said. "It is an object we find useful in the hunting of—small animals. Climb aboard, and we will remove it from their sight."

Victoria went into the ship first, and Stu followed. After a while, they were joined by Doati, who went to the control panel of the ship. Then Analta returned.

In the sky they watched the small planet disappear in the viewport.

"Your friends will be themselves again by now," he said.

"They're not our friends," Stu answered bitterly. "They were going to exploit us—make a carnival out of our world. And we were going to be the prize curiosity . . ."

"Curiosity," Analta said musingly. "Yet they're curious little things themselves. So tiny, yet so puffed up with a sense of importance. Our people will be most amused when they hear our story, and see our little specimen."

"Specimen?" Victoria said.

"You'll have to forgive me. But when I returned for the gem, I found it hard to resist bringing one of the little beings with us. He will make a most remarkable exhibit!"

He produced a round, transparent container, capped by a fine mesh. He held it up to their sight. The little figure within was beating the sides with helpless rage, and Stu wondered if Damon Scully had heard the giant's words.

THE END

FORGOTTEN WORLD

By ROBERT SILVERBERG

They sent Wilcox out to find a certain world. And if you don't think that was a tough assignment, go out some clear night and start counting the stars. So his odds were long. But far longer the odds of his staying alive after he found it.

WILCOX had been looking for the planet, but hadn't figured on crash-landing. He was part of a great search-pattern that covered the galaxy in orderly sweeps; looking for a planet whose location had been forgotten; whose name was a hazy blur.

He'd stumbled over it, still not sure it was what he sought; but his ship was out of control, and he plunged toward its blue-green surface.

"Wilcox to Central."

The reply after a brief time-lag. "Come in, Wilcox."

"Developed silication of reactor. Abandoning ship in vicinity of uncharted planet. Do you read me?"

"We read you. Transmit coordinates. We'll get a rescue ship out. Over."

Wilcox computed swiftly. "Wilcox to Central. Coordinates as follows." He paused. "Do you read me?"

No acknowledgement. The radio was dead except for occasional click of submicronic particles crashing against the magnetic filter.

"Do you read me?"

No answer. He looked out the port. The planet below was spinning ever larger. If it were the one he hoped, he stood a chance of finding people and a transmitter and relaying his position to a rescue team. If not—

Wilcox gathered together some food pellets, his blaster, thumbnail-sized microeditions of the Bible and Shakespeare's plays, stuffed them in the pockets of his spacesuit and sealed the flaps. He locked the ship on course, a collision or-

bit with the nearing planet. Then, dropping through the hatch, he drifted out into space, to hang motionless while his ship drifted silently away.

He watched the gleaming hull blaze up as it entered the planet's atmosphere. A few seconds later, it was a smoking heap of slag racing to a crash-landing.

Wilcox fired two blaster shots, setting himself in motion. He drifted downward, and entered the gravitational field of the planet below.

"Are you from the skies, stranger?"

Wilcox stared at the girl. She came up silently as he cut himself free of his parachute. She seemed unafraid.

"I am from the skies," he told her. "Can you tell me how far it is to the nearest city?"

"City? What's a city?" Her pronunciation was oddly old-fashioned, as though she spoke a dialect long out of date.

"A place where a lot of people live together. A big village."

"Why would many people want to live together?"

He smiled. There was something infectious about her innocence, as she stood there wrapped in a ragged animal-hide. "That's a hard one to answer."

"Why do you hide behind that great heavy bearskin? It is a fine warm day. Even my deerskin feels too heavy for me."

"You've got a point there," Wilcox admitted. He pressed the unsealing stud and his spacesuit split longitudinally. The girl gaped as he stepped out from between the two halves and began unloading the things he had stored in the spacesuit pockets and stuffing them into his tunic. It was a strange sight.

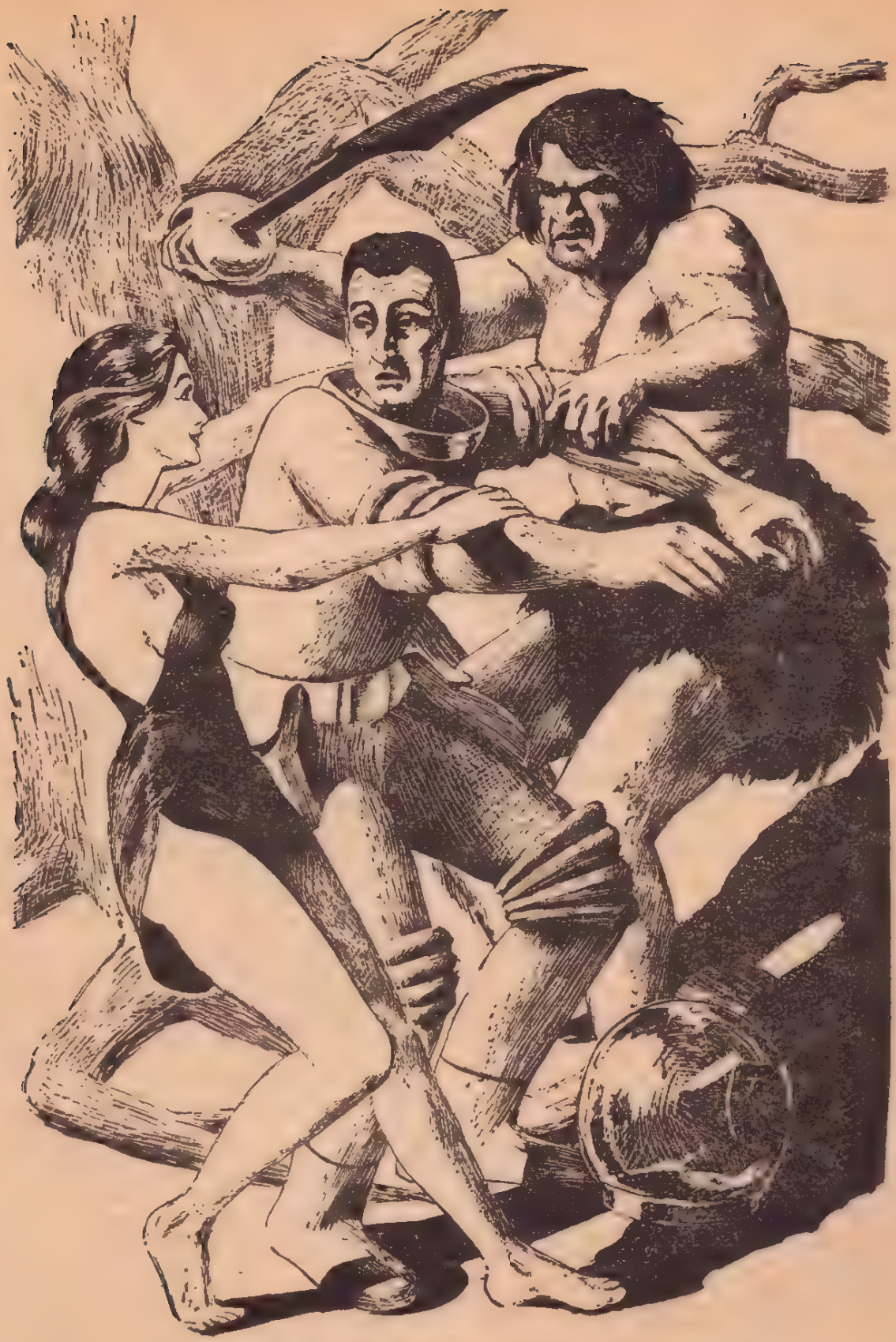
"Those are remarkable things you wear," the girl said. "So big and heavy. It must be cold where you come from."

Wilcox looked around. It was a good place. Leafy trees; a carpet of grass; a blue pond nearby. Birds sang overhead, and the yellow sun was warm and comforting. A good planet, he thought.

Only—was it the planet he was looking for?

It seemed too unspoiled, too primeval for that. The planet he wanted would most likely be groaning with cities; would not have an inch of free space.

"Why do you stand there thinking so hard?" the girl asked. "You look worried.



He was torn between the Beast and Beauty—not knowing which was more dangerous.

Tell me your name and I'll tell you mine."

"Wilcox."

"I'm Arma."

"Where do your people live, Arma?"

"All over," she said, gesturing. "Come on, let's go swimming. It's a hot day, and I'm tired of talking so much."

"Swimming?"

She took him by the arm and began dragging him over the meadow toward the shimmering pond. "I love to swim, don't you?"

He let her pull him along until they reached the pond where the girl slipped out of her deerskin. Her lithe, graceful body was tanned from head to toe.

As Wilcox stood there, completely confused, she asked, "You're not going swimming with your clothes on, are you?"

"You're not going swimming at all." This new voice, deep, masculine, came from behind him. "Get your clothes on, Arma. Who is this stranger?"

Wilcox whirled to see a deeply tanned, well-muscled man clad in deerskin, with a gleaming sword grasped firmly in his right hand. He was a big man, matching Wilcox's own six-three.

"Who are you, stranger?" he repeated.

"He came from the sky'" Arma said. "I found him, and—"

"Be quiet, Arma." He strode past Wilcox toward the girl, who was hastily donning her deerskin. He slapped her. Fingermarks stood out on the girl's brown cheek. She staggered backward.

"My name is Lorvik," said the man. "I don't allow my women to fool around with strangers. Draw and defend yourself!"

The newcomer's sword flashed in the sunlight. Wilcox started to protest that he had no sword, but saw it would do no good. He sidestepped. The blade whistled past his ear.

Wilcox reached for his blaster and was ready for Lorvik's next charge. As the sword sang through the air, Wilcox fired once, on medium beam. Lorvik howled and stared down stupidly at the stubby hilt of his sword—all that was left.

Lorvik's face was white with terror. "Lightning—out of his hand—struck my sword." He hurled it away in terror.

Wilcox lowered the blaster. "Now *I'm* in charge."

"No you're not!" cried

Arma. She sprang to his side. Before he was aware of what was happening she had wrenched the blaster from his relaxed grasp and hurled it into the depths of the pond.

Stunned by her action, he blurted, "Why'd you do that?"

"Such weapons are unfair," she said. "You could kill us all, Wilcox. We have no such things on our world."

Despite his anger, he had to admit the justice of what she said. If the best weapon they had here was the broadsword, a man with a blaster could wreck their civilization. Arma had wisely taken advantage of a lapse on his part to dispose of this threat to their social structure. From now on, he'd be on equal terms with these people.

Lorvik advanced toward him barehanded.

"Now none of us have any weapons," Lorvik said. "Now we will see who is stronger." And he leaped toward Wilcox.

The spaceman met the charge standing up and pushed Lorvik back a couple of steps with two quick blows to the stomach. Lorvik seemed rock-hard. His fist ripped into the spaceman's midsection, but Wilcox caught his breath and rode with the blow. Then Lorvik seemed to be crawling all over him, pushing him down, getting his steely fingers around Wilcox's throat.

Wilcox arched his back against the ground and forced himself back to an erect position. He tugged at Lorvik's fingers, broke the hold, and smashed his fist into the other's jaw. Lorvik rocked and Wilcox followed with a sharp body-blow beneath the heart. He realized now that the gravity of this planet was considerably lighter than that of his native world, and that gave him a definite muscular advantage. He pressed forward and finally knocked Lorvik sprawling with a left to the chin.

The warrior struggled to a sitting position but made no attempt to get up. "You have won," he admitted finally. "You have beaten me." He got unsteadily to his feet and took a few wobbling steps. Wilcox remained on guard until it was evident that Lorvik had no fight left in him.

"You are a mighty warrior," Lorvik said humbly. "The girl is yours."

Wilcox recoiled, startled. Had they been fighting over the girl? Apparently they had, because Arma came running toward him and nestled against his side, while Lorvik

limped away, looking defeated and unhappy.

"You have beaten him," the girl said. "It is the first time anybody has. He won't bother you any more."

Wilcox looked down at her and smiled. It made him feel good to know that a representative of the galactic civilization could still hold his own in a fistfight with a barbarian.

Only—would he ever see that galactic civilization again?

He turned to Arma. "Now I want to go to where your people live. There is something I must find out."

"First we finish our swim," she said playfully, as she gracefully swam about.

The village was a little huddle of thatched huts about two miles back the other way. As Arma and Wilcox entered it, he heard a subdued buzzing of voices. Probably they had heard that their invincible Lorvik had been conquered, and wanted to see who had done the undoable.

A small, white-haired man emerged from one of the huts.

"My father," Arma said. "Father, this is Wilcox. He has taken me away from Lorvik."

"The news had reached us already." The old man looked Wilcox up and down. "Welcome to our tribe," he said.

"I'm not here to stay. I've come from the skies, and I intend to return."

The old man showed surprise. "Eh? The skies?"

Wilcox nodded. "My ship went out of control and crashed. I have to get to a radio and call my people to come rescue me."

"A what?"

"A radio," Wilcox said carefully. "A machine for calling through space from one planet to another."

Both Arma and her father chuckled. "No such thing has ever existed," the old man said. "And none will." Smiling, he went back into his hut.

Wilcox turned to Arma. "Does he really mean that?"

She shrugged. "We have no such instrument. We have few machines at all. There were some, in the old days, but they have been forgotten and buried."

Wilcox leaned forward. "What do you know of the old days?"

"Not much. We know that once many people lived here, and that most of them are gone. There are not many tribes left here."

Wilcox nodded. This was starting to sound more and more like the forgotten planet

that was being sought in the most intense hunt in the history of the civilized galaxy. But a lot of good it would be to have found it, if he had no way of leaving or of notifying Central of his accidental discovery.

Arma came close to him and nestled against him. He smiled. Even if he never did get back, would it be so bad?

They gave him Lorvik's old hut, and the defeated warrior —moved out into a smaller one. Wilcox discovered that the natives here operated on a strict code of honor, in which a triumph was a triumph and a defeat a defeat. Lorvik, in defending his honor, had lost, and accepted the loss without malice.

"You look unhappy, Wilcox," Arma said one evening, as they sat outside their hut.

"Not really," he said. "I like it here. It's quiet and clean. I've been really at peace, for the first time in my life. Only—"

"Only what, Wilcox?"

He started to tell her about the great galaxy outside, the millions of worlds decking the sky. Her eyes widened as he told her of the glittering brilliance of his home world, Canopus IV, of the mechanized cities of Rigel, of television and tridims and the thrill of a rocket-blast as you pounded from one planet to the next.

He spoke for perhaps half an hour without stopping, recreating the universe he had left behind when he had crash-landed on this primitive alien world. Then he stopped, realizing he had been speaking too long, and looked at her. She was watching him, entranced.

"It sounds wonderful," she said softly.

He nodded. "And I'll never see it again. There's no way of getting back."

She fell silent for a while. Then her eyes brightened and she said, "Wilcox?"

"Yes, Arma?"

"If—if I found you a way of getting back, would you take me with you, out there to the skyworlds?"

He turned, surprised at her remark. "What?"

She smiled gently. "It would mean doing a very bad thing—but I know you would like to get home. And I would like to go with you," she added shyly.

"What do you mean?" he asked, his voice excited.

"Out there—over the hill, and down a long, winding road—there is another village, a bigger one. And in

that village, there is a temple. A temple that keeps all the old things, the things from the forgotten past. You might be able to find a—a *radio,* there."

"Where, Arma? When can we leave?"

She put a hand on his wrist. "It is forbidden to enter the temple. The people of the other village guard it day and night. It is a sacred place, and there are great taboos against the things it contains. I—I am frightened. But I'll take you there, and perhaps you will find what you want."

He stood up. "I wish you hadn't thrown my blaster away. It's going to be hard to fight my way into that temple with just a sword."

She blushed. "I had to do it. You might have killed us all with it; I didn't know."

"I understand. All right, let's go."

"Right now?"

"Right now," Wilcox said. His heart was pounding; there *was* a way home after all.

Morning was breaking when they reached the other village.

"There it is," she said. She pointed ahead.

On a low hill another village was clustered, and behind it was a tall, glass-walled building which looked oddly out of place in these primitive surroundings.

"It is left from the old times," Arma said. "Everything else is gone."

They entered the village. The shining bulk of the temple grew closer.

They rounded a corner and took a new path that led up toward the temple. And, suddenly, from no place, a dozen men with unsheathed swords stepped out and blocked their path.

Wilcox was astonished to recognize the leader as Lorvik. He tried to circumvent the blockade but Lorvik intervened. "You were overheard talking outside your hut last night. We knew you were going to try and enter the temple."

More men crowded around. Wilcox saw now that they were men of both villages, half strangers and half familiar faces. Evidently all the local warriors had raced to the other village to head him off.

He drew his sword with great ostentation and held it firmly at his side.

"You can't fight them all," Arma said.

"I don't want to," said Wilcox. He took a step forward

toward the angry men who barred his path. "Let me through."

"You can't go through," replied Lorvik. "The temple is taboo. No man is allowed to enter it."

Very deliberately, Wilcox sheathed his sword and walked toward them. Several of the men bristled their weapons in the air, ready to strike.

"I have come from a distant world, sent here to see what your world is like. Today is the day I am supposed to contact my people. If they don't hear from me today, they will invade and lay waste to your entire planet."

The men turned and conferred with each other. Wilcox watched them. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Arma slipping noiselessly into the underbrush. He tensed, hoping she would be unnoticed.

Lorvik looked uneasily at Wilcox. "How can we believe you? We have been taught that fire from the gods will descend on us if we *do* enter the temple—and you say we will be destroyed if you don't!"

"That's your problem," Wilcox said evenly. The villagers looked more and more confused. Arguments started to break out among them. Wilcox sucked in his breath and tightened his muscles.

He had stalled long enough. He backed up a few steps, then a few more. Then, gathering his strength, he ran forward and leaped.

Gravity was on his side. His greater muscular strength carried him up, brought him soaring over the heads of the astonished villagers, and deposited him some ten feet behind them. Without looking back, he began to run up the hill toward the temple.

Arma was waiting for him there, and the metallic gleam in her hand told him that the girl had acted intelligently. He dashed up to where she stood and she handed him the blaster.

The metal felt cool and comforting against the palm of his hand. It was a really antique model, though still recognizably a blaster. He aimed at the ground and pressed the firing stud. Nothing happened. In the thousands of years since the blaster had been charged, the power had, of course, dissipated. But he wouldn't need any power for what he had in mind.

He looked down the hill. The townsfolk were straggling up toward them in superstitious awe, still clinging

to their swords but obviously unwilling to have much to do with anyone who had the power of flight. He permitted them to come within twenty yards.

"Stop!"

They stopped. Wilcox faced them, letting the sunlight glint off his blaster.

A big man shouted. "Let's charge him! He can't fight all of us!"

"I wouldn't advise it," Wilcox said. "Not while I have this."

"What is a piece of metal against men with swords?"

"Tell them, Lorvik," Wilcox commanded.

"He used it on me," Lorvik said hoarsely. "It—it melted my sword away. He can burn us to death with it."

The crowd took a few steps backward. Some turned and ran off back toward the village.

"Go," Wilcox shouted, brandishing the blaster. "Go before I call down lightning on you all!"

The remainder followed suit. Wilcox smiled and handed the useless blaster to Arma. "Stay out here and keep guard. If anyone comes sneaking back, yell."

In the temple musty cobwebs hung down from everywhere, causing him to cough and choke. He knew what the place was—a museum—a monument to a vanished civilization, probably the finest civilization the galaxy had ever known.

There were secrets worth fortunes in here, secrets out of the distant past that had long been forgotten. Wilcox knew of the legends about this world, of the ancient teleport machines, the matter transmitters, the other wonders of the ancients that had been lost, over the course of millennia, by the galaxy. Legend said they were here—and they were.

He had to find a radio first, and the other things could wait.

He groped through the blackness, past exhibit cases and unopened boxes — the wonders of a lost civilization, taboo to the primitive villagers who were its only pitiful survivors. He saw the broken case of firearms from which Arma had grabbed the blaster. He continued to fumble.

Then he stumbled on it, the way he had stumbled upon the planet itself. It was a subradio set, still functioning and not too different from sets still in use.

After some moments' difficulty with the unfamiliar an-

cient characters, he got the thing to work . . .

"Fire us the coordinates, will you?"

From memory, Wilcox reeled off the figures he had been about to give before his radio went dead aboard ship.

"It fits the description, all right. Yellow sun, oxygen-and-nitrogen atmosphere, and green vegetation. These identifications all tally? Over."

"They tally," Wilcox said. "We've found it, all right. And it's the treasure-trove we expected."

"Good job, Wilcox. We'll have a rescue ship right down."

Arma was waiting for him outside.

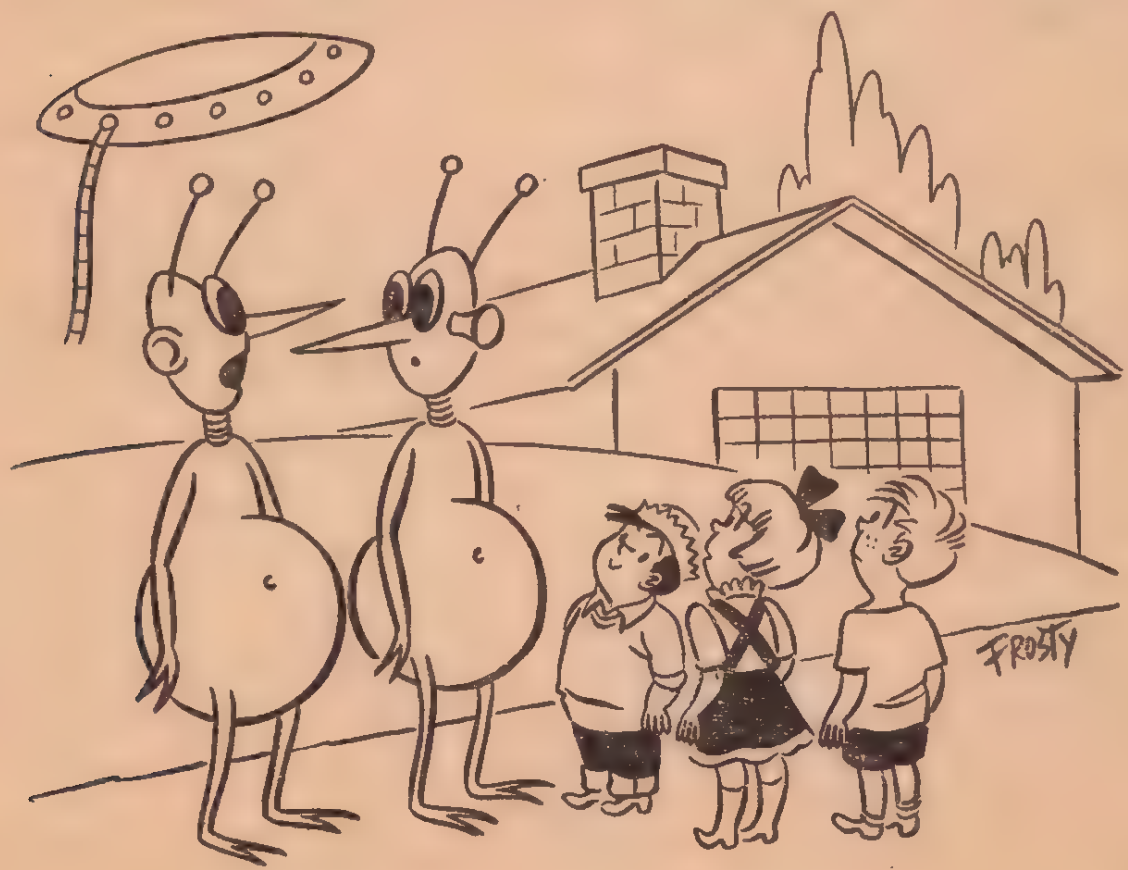
"Any trouble?"

"None at all. They're really scared. You find the radio?"

He nodded. "They'll have a ship down here pretty soon."

"And it will take us back to where you come from," Arma said. "I can't wait, darling!" She looked up at him anxiously as he put his arm around her and they began to walk back down the hill. "But—is this the place you were looking for?"

"Of course it is," he said, smiling. "I never doubted it from the first. This is Earth, all right." **THE END**



"Ask which one invented the atom bomb."

CITADEL OF DARKNESS

By RALPH BURKE

The only allies Mike had in this fight were a bunch of characters who automatically dropped dead when they stepped outside the city limits.

THE wavering green lines of the mass detector told me that there was a planet ahead where no planet ought to be, and my skin started to crawl. I checked the star-guide a second time, running down the tight-packed printed columns with deliberate care.

Karen's soft hand brushed lightly across my shoulder, and I glanced up. "The guide doesn't say anything about planets in this sector of space," I told her.

"Have you checked the coordinates?"

"I've checked everything. There's a planet out ahead, approximately two light-months from us. And you know what it has to be."

"It's Lanargon," she said simply. "Lanargon. The marauder world."

Anything these brutes got

from Karen was going to be taken by force.

"It can't be anything else. There's no star within sight, none supposed to be here, and yet the mass detector's popping like sixty. The only answer is a wandering sunless world—and there's only one of those."

I turned away and busied myself over the control panel. My fingers flew lightly over the computer levers, and micro-relays clicked and buzzed behind the green plexilite screen.

After a moment, Karen said, "What are you doing?"

"Setting up a landing orbit," I told her without looking up. "As long as we're here, we might as well investigate. We can't pass up a chance like this."

I expected opposition, but I was surprised. All she said was, "How soon before we land?" No nervousness, no hesitation. She looked a lot cooler than I felt as I went about the job of preparing for our landing on Lanargon, the galaxy's most dreaded—and most mysterious—planet.

It was in the year 3159 that the Terran colony on Faubia III was wiped out by armed attack, and word came to the universe that war was with us again. The worlds of mankind looked at each other in suspicion and fear. Five centuries of galactic amity had brought about the feeling that armed strife was a buried relic of antiquity—and then, without warning, came the attack on Faubia III.

There were universal denials. A year later, Metagol II was sacked by unknown invaders, and later the same year Vescalor IX, the universe's greatest source of antivirotic drugs, was conquered.

The circumstances were the same each time. An army of tall men in black spacesuits would descend suddenly upon the unsuspecting planet, destroy its capital, seize control of the planet's leaders, and carry off plunder. Then, mysteriously as they came, they would depart, always taking many prisoners with them.

The attacks continued. The marauders struck seemingly at random here and there across the face of the galaxy. Trantor was hit in 3168, Vornak IV three years after that. In 3175, Earth itself was subjected to a raid.

The universe recoiled in terror. The Multiworld Federation searched desperately for the answer—and found it. It made us no more comfortable to learn that the marauders were aliens from some far

island universe who rode their sunless planet like a giant spaceship, who had crossed the great gulf of space that separated their galaxy from ours and now, under cloak of their virtual invisibility, traveled through our group of worlds, burning, pillaging, and looting as they went.

We were helpless against an invader we could not see. And now, possibly for the first time, someone had taken Lanargon by surprise. The marauder world had crossed our orbit as we returned to Earth from Rigel VI, and it lay squarely in our path, wrapped in its cloak of darkness out there in the eternal black of space.

I watched its bulk grow on the mass detector, and wiped away a trickle of perspiration that had started to crawl down my forehead. Two people—a man and a woman—against a world of the deadliest killers ever known.

As an Earthman, as a member of the Multiworld Federation, it was my duty to aid in Lanargon's destruction. And I had an idea for doing it.

I locked the ship into automatic, watched the computer buzz twice to confirm that it had taken control, and got up. Karen was still standing behind me. Her face was pale and drawn; all the color seemed to have left it, though her eyes glowed with courage.

She reached out and took my hand as I stepped away from the controls. I folded her hand in both of mine, and squeezed.

"It has to be done, doesn't it?" she asked softly.

I nodded, thinking of the home that awaited us on Earth, the friends, the children. Heroes don't have to be born; sometimes they're made by a trajectory-line charted between two worlds.

"It has to be done," I said. I drew her close. For all I knew, it was going to be the last time.

Our ship taxied in slowly, spiralling around Lanargon in ever-narrowing circles. I could see it plainly now from the viewport, a rough, ugly-looking, barren world, boasting not even the drifts of snow that would be a frozen atmosphere. Lanargon was just a ball of rock, seen dimly in the starlight. Great leaping mountains sprang up like dragon's teeth from the rocky plains beneath. There was no sign of life. None.

I glanced over at Karen, who was strapped securely in

her acceleration cradle at my side. She was smiling.

"We'll be there soon," I said.

"Good. This suspense is starting to get me. I'd like to get down there and get it over with—whatever it is we're going to do."

"I've got bad news for you, if you're in a hurry," I said. "We may need months before we get through."

"Why? What will happen?"

"We're going to tell the universe about Lanargon," I said. "Where it is, where it may be going, how to come get it. We're in a pretty empty part of space, though. Even by subradio, it may take weeks before we get within range of some other world."

"You mean we're going to stay on Lanargon until you make radio contact with some other planet?"

I nodded. "We're going to turn ourselves into living signal buoys. We're going to ride on Lanargon like fleas on a gorilla's back for a while. I hope they don't notice us, and just keep on moving until they come close enough to some inhabited planet for us to get out an SOS."

"And then?"

"Then we get out of here as fast as we can, and wait for the Multiworld Fleet to home in on the coordinates we've given and blast Lanargon to the fate it so thoroughly deserves," I said. "The only problem is staying unfound long enough to give the message. At the moment, we're well out of range of anyone who could pick it up."

I leaned back and moistened my dry lips. "Hold tight, kid. We're almost there."

Within the hour, we had approached Lanargon's surface and were hovering no more than a hundred miles above, moving into the final stage of our landing. Minutes later, our ship dropped gently down and touched ground.

I was the first one up, and was half into my spacesuit before Karen had climbed out of her acceleration cradle. She followed me into the airlock when she was ready, and together we stepped outside.

It was a dead world. Perhaps it once had had a sun and an atmosphere and the warmth of life, but now it was but the corpse of a planet —inhabited, who knew where, by the merciless aliens who had terrorized the universe.

"It's—it's the most horrible place I've ever seen," Karen said, as we stood together at the base of the ship, looking

around at the planet that would be our home until we made contact with some inhabited world.

"That's the only word for it," I agreed. I almost shivered, though I was fully protected from the cold by my spacesuit. We could see—dimly, by the faint glow of the sprinkling of stars above—a few miles of the planet's surface, and it was hardly a cheering sight. Lanargon was a slagheap, a vast desert of twisted lava forced into tortured convolutions, of ageless rocks and jutting mountains, stony and bleak.

"I hope it's over quickly," Karen said.

"I hope so too. Let's go back in and send out the SOS—suppose we beam it five times a day until we get response—and then start exploring a little. I'd like to know just where the aliens are."

"Underground, maybe," Karen suggested. "Or in a domed city hidden somewhere in those awful mountains."

"That's probably it," I said, nodding.

We returned to the ship and started the message on its way, announcing that we had discovered Lanargon accidentally, had landed, and would remain here acting as a signal-beacon until contacted by a member of the Multiworld Federation.

I snapped off the transmitter when we were through. "That should do it," I said. "Now we'll just have to wait, and keep sending it, and wait some more. One of these days we'll get a reply, and we'll tell them exactly how to go about getting to Lanargon and blasting it out of the skies. Then our job's done."

Karen frowned. "What if the aliens discover what we're doing, and set out to find us?"

"No use thinking about it, honey. We'll just have to sit here quietly and hope we're not noticed by the wrong people. It won't be fun, but what else can we do?"

"It's like sitting on the rim of a live volcano," Karen said. "And taking bets on when the top will blow off."

"Come on," I said. "Let's go outside and do some exploring. For all we know, we've landed right next door to an alien city."

I stood up and led the way. I knew some exercise would loosen her tight-stretched nerves a little.

I stared for a moment at the dreary stretch of slag and needle-edged rocks. "You go to the left," I said. "I'll go

the other way, and we'll see what this place looks like."

"Sounds good enough," Karen said. She started to move off toward the towering mountain that looked down at the ship from the left, while I made my way over the heaps of rock to the cliff at the right.

I kept up a running conversation with her over the suitphones as we went.

"How's it look from there?" I asked.

"Pretty much the same," she said. "There's a long plain, and then this mountain. Twenty-five, thirty thousand feet high, I'd say. I can't see the top of it."

"Nice," I said. "Things are dull here. The cliff looks down on a valley, and there's a sign of something that might have been a river once, before Lanargon tore loose from its sun. But there's no sign of life anywhere."

"Do you think this might be the wrong place? Some other dark planet that no one knows about?"

"I don't think so," I said, as I scaled up a jagged precipice and heaved myself onto a small plateau. "They're probably all on the other side of this planet. It's a big place, you know. I'm sure that—"

I stopped, chilled, and whirled at the sound of the terrible scream that ripped through my suitphones at that moment. I paused, not knowing in which direction I should run, and then, as Karen's scream burst forth again, I began to race wildly through the twisting outcrops toward her.

"Mike! Mike! They are here!"

"I'm coming," I told her, and kept on running. A moment later, the ship came into sight, and I passed it and headed in the direction Karen had taken. It led through a dropping path into the plain that approached the mountain, and I dashed out toward her.

I saw her a moment later. She was standing on the top of a rock outcrop about ten feet high, kicking savagely at ten or twelve space-suited figures who were attempting to climb up and reach her. We had found the planet—but its inhabitants had gotten to us first.

I leaped forward and shouted my encouragement as I came. The next minute, I was at the base of the plateau, piling into the gang of aliens. They were husky, sturdy creatures, humanoid in shape, clad in dark spacesuits that

made them almost invisible in the faint starlight.

I dragged one of them away from the path leading to the top of the plateau and crashed my gloved fist into his stomach. He bounded back without showing that the blow had hurt him, and made a signal to the others.

Immediately they split into two groups, working with calm, cold efficiency. Five or six of them continued to try to reach Karen, and the rest turned on me. I found myself surrounded by half a dozen aliens.

I struck out at the first one and saw him go reeling into the arms of one of his comrades, but then another hit me a stunning blow from behind. I staggered forward, felt another fist drive into my stomach. The flexible material of my suit yielded, and I gasped for breath.

Pulling away, I caught one alien by the arm and swung him down, but two more hit me at once. A gloved hand bashed into the yielding plastic of my face mask, and I went flying down on my back. I felt someone pommeling me viciously for a few moments, and then I stopped feeling anything.

When I awoke, Karen and the ship and the aliens were gone, and I was alone on the plain, sprawled out with my arms wrapped fondly around a small boulder that I had been using as a pillow.

The aliens had seen us, had come, had taken Karen, and had left for—where? What had they done with Karen? I hurled the questions at myself, angry for having allowed us to separate even for the moment. Fear began to mount within me.

I picked myself up, and took a few unsteady trial steps. I ached all over from my beating, but I managed to shake off the dizziness and keep on going. I had to find Karen, wherever she was, get her back to Earth somehow. I didn't know how I was going to do it.

Lanargon was a big planet. There was no light to guide me. And the ship was gone.

Evidently they had left me for dead and taken Karen and the ship back to wherever it was they had come from. I started walking, not knowing and not caring which direction I might be heading in, simply putting one foot after another in the blind energy of complete despair. I headed down the long sweeping plain, walking nowhere on this world of perpetual night-

fall, a dull pain throbbing all over my body.

I don't have any idea how long I walked before the light appeared. All I know is I had been marching mechanically without so much as noticing where I was going, moving up one outcrop and down the next—and then, I became conscious of a glimmer of light in the distance. It was faint, but impossible to mistake against the inky Lanargon blackness.

Suddenly I returned to life. I started to trot animatedly toward the source of light, hoping wildly it might be a signal beam of some sort sent up by Karen. As I drew near, though, I discovered what it was.

It was a small party of aliens, gathered together at the edge of a sprawling range of low-lying hills. There were about five of them, and in their midst was a portable generator which threw off just enough light to illuminate their camp. I guessed that they were another party out searching for us who were not aware that the other group had already achieved its mission.

I approached them in a wide semi-circle, swinging around from the left so I would be above them on the foothills. I could see now that they had a small vehicle of some sort, and that they were dismantling their camp and loading the equipment they had with them into the vehicle. I revised my earlier guess; this was a search-party who knew that the quarry had been snared, and which was preparing to return to home base.

I drew closer to them, close enough now to see that they were nearing the end of their task. I would have to move quickly.

I made my way down the side of the hill, deciding which one of the aliens was to be my victim. By the time I was on the plain, I had my man. He was busy about a hundred feet away, dismantling a wireless transmitter of some sort. The groundcar cut him off from the other four neatly. But I had to get him the first time; any struggle and I'd find myself fighting off all five of them within an instant.

I picked up a jagged triangular rock and squeezed it lovingly as I edged across the plain. The alien was bending over, doing something to the base of the transmitter.

After glancing around to make sure I was unobserved,

I raised my hand high and brought the rock down against the back of the alien's head. He fell forward without a sound and sprawled out grotesquely on the transmitter.

"Sleep tight," I murmured, as I dragged him further into the shadows. Working quickly, I peeled his spacesuit from him, tossed the body to one side—what it looked like, in the airless void that was Lanargon's cloak, was stomach-turning — and stepped smoothly into the suit, pulling it on over my own. The aliens were big men; I was able to fit, suit and all, into the alien suit without trouble.

I returned to the transmitter and pulled it free of the ground. Another of the aliens appeared and waved to me, as if signalling that I should hurry up. I waved back, picked up the transmitter, and walked over to join the group.

They were about to get into their vehicle as I drew near. I kept my head down, didn't say anything, and climbed aboard, dragging the transmitter up with me. I stood in the corner of the car as it sped over the ground, holding my breath and hoping against hope that none of them would say anything to me.

None of them did. And, some twenty minutes later, the crystal dome of a huge city appeared in view. It arched high above the plain, and within I could see the business of a great city—the home of the marauders.

The car sped through the airlock and into the domed city. My breath left me as I contemplated the magnitude of the alien city, by far the largest dome in the universe. It must have contained a population of millions or of tens of millions.

As we moved rapidly deeper into the city, I heard my companions behind me slipping out of their spacesuits. In a moment, they stood revealed—tall, muscular humanoids whose chief alien distinction was the network of fine blue veins criss-crossing the golden skin of their hard, cold faces, and the two sinewy tentacles which sprouted from their sides just below their arms.

I began to sweat. No doubt they would wonder shortly why I was remaining in my suit now that we were inside the city. I couldn't very well explain that if I removed the suit, my own spacesuit would be revealed beneath.

I felt a rough hand on my shoulder—and then, immense-

ly more horrible, something which was not a hand spun me around. I faced one of the aliens, looked straight into the cold eyes of one of the creatures of Lanargon.

He snapped something at me, two short sentences in a harsh-sounding, unfamiliar language. I glared blankly at him, and he repeated his question.

Again I made no reply, and he peered closely, staring into the misty faceglass of my spacesuit. He must have seen what he was looking for, because a moment later he had called two of his companions over to see me. I heard them discussing the situation excitedly.

Apparently they didn't know what to make of my presence. A live Earthman somehow smuggled into their car? It bewildered them, just for a split second.

A split second was just enough. I smashed a fist into the nearest alien just as he had made up his mind to grab me, and sent him pirouetting back against his two friends. They wobbled around in the speedily-moving truck for a couple of seconds, and I lifted the transmitter I had brought in and hurled it at them.

They bounced back against the wall. A fourth alien appeared and I felt the cold grip of his tentacle for a moment. I slashed out with the side of my hand and knocked the tentacle away. Then I had opened the door of the car, and, without looking at the ground below, leaped out.

I hit the ground as it came up to meet me. My spaceboots absorbed most of the shock, but it still rippled through me like a junior-grade lightning bolt as I hit. I sank to my knees for a second, then elbowed up and started to run.

I was free and at large—in the domed city of the Lanargon marauders. Somewhere in this sprawling citadel was Karen. I began to run down a side street, as an alarm sounded somewhere behind me.

It was a completely alien city. I crouched in a pit of shadows beneath a building of dizzying height and looked around, struck by the utter strangeness of the sunless city.

The dome reached high into the airless sky, and outside it I could see the black wall of space. The buildings were delicate, airy things, with networks of web hanging from one to the next. I saw aliens crawling over these

webs spider-fashion to get from one building to another.

The air seemed warm—at least, the aliens I saw moving through the streets were dressed skimpily—and the many spiky trees with blue leaves glittering in the brightness of the air were thriving as if it were a tropical climate.

The buildings were arranged in concentric circles, I saw; apparently they radiated outward from the atomic pile that would undoubtedly be the heart of such a dome. It was a giant, incredible, artificial city, probably built with the slave labor of the millions of prisoners taken during the years of Lanargon raids.

I was safe so long as I remained crouching where I was. But I knew I would never rescue Karen that way, though.

The first step was to find a weapon. I noticed that the aliens of both sexes went about armed, and that seemed my easiest chance. I edged out of my hiding place and moved toward the street, waiting for a pedestrian to come by alone.

It took three nerve-wracking minutes—and when one came, it was a female. She was over six feet tall, with a magnificent body only nominally covered by her brief clothing, and strapped to her hip was a gem-studded blaster. I stepped out behind her as she went past.

"I hate to do this to a lady," I said apologetically, as I clubbed down on the back of her neck and grabbed the blaster from its holster in the same motion. She started to crumple before I had the gun out.

I hauled her back into the shadows and left her lying there. I still had no idea where to go, but now I was armed. The blaster was an efficient and murderous-looking weapon, and I wouldn't have to rely on my fists alone any longer.

I strapped on the blaster and glanced warily around. No one in sight. I knew I'd look tremendously conspicuous in this spacesuit, but I would have to chance it. I'd look even more conspicuous walking around without it.

Karen was here someplace, I told myself—but I realized I had only a fool's chance of finding her. I was ready to give her up for lost, if I could carry out a bigger project: that of getting to the atomic reactor that was the core of this city and destroying it. I felt completely nerveless. I

had a job, and I was going to do it. Life without Karen wouldn't mean much any more—but I could redeem it if I could take all of Lanargon with us.

I walked inward, toward the center of the city.

People stared curiously at me, wondering why I was wearing a spacesuit, no doubt, but no one said anything. I continued trudging along the yielding permoplast streets, and after a block or two I found what I was looking for —a Lanargon slave.

He was obviously an Earthman, in his early thirties, which meant he had been grabbed in the raid of 3175. He was wearing only a loincloth, no blaster, and so his slave status was apparent.

I followed him for about thirty paces, until we reached the corner. Then I edged in behind him and said quietly, "Turn left at this corner, will you?"

He glanced back, saw what must have been an imposing spacesuited figure, and obeyed without questioning. "Who are you?" he asked when we had rounded the corner.

"An Earthman," I said. "You can help me."

Quickly I explained the course of events from the time Lanargon first had showed up in the mass detector to Karen's kidnapping.

"I've heard about that," he said. "I saw the girl and the ship arrive."

"Where are they?" I asked immediately.

"The girl's been taken to the Central Temple. I'm a slave there. The ship's been brought into the dome too, and it's not far from the Temple either. The Lanargon scientists want to study it and see if they're missing any wrinkles."

"What Temple? What are they going to do to Karen?"

The slave looked at me pityingly for a long moment. "The Temple is the place all the power of the dome comes from. The aliens worship it as a shrine. They're going to sacrifice your wife to their god. Their god's a pool of live radiation."

"What?"

He nodded. "They do it every year, usually with a female slave. I heard them talking. I'm in the High Priest's retinue, and I found out about it. The ceremony's scheduled to take place this afternoon."

I gripped his hand. "Can you get me there? We don't have much time." I didn't know what I was going to do,

but I was going to do something. I was sure of that.

He glanced uneasily up and down the street. "It's worth a try," he said. "This hellhole deserves to be blasted wide open."

He led me along at a rapid pace toward the heart of the city. After a while, I saw a huge conical building loom up before me. And—outside it—was my ship!

"There it is!" I said. "That must be the Temple."

"That's right. And your ship. Now, if there were only some way of finding your wife and getting clear—"

I looked at him. "Wait a minute," I said. "There are thousands, maybe millions of you slaves on Lanargon. Innocent people. Suppose I do succeed? Suppose I blasted the dome down? You'd all die."

The slave smiled bitterly. "Don't get guilt-feelings over that," he said. He lifted his arm and showed me a metallic bulge along his side. "See this? It's a compact transistor wave-generator embedded in my flesh. Removing it means death. And if we get further than a dozen miles from the Dome, it kills us automatically. It's very efficient—and it means that no slave can ever leave Lanargon alive."

The enormity of it chilled me. "That helps to keep you in line neatly, doesn't it?" I said.

He nodded. "They can also kill us within the city. If a slave steps out of line, it's the easiest thing to raise the frequency generated by this device to a lethal pitch. They'll allow a slave to go almost anywhere, because he can't possibly do any harm—not when his life can be snuffed out by any master in an instant."

A sudden burst of thought illuminated my mind. "If that's true, I think I know how I can carry this thing off. Let's go someplace where I can get out of all these spacesuits and into a slave's loincloth!" My mind raced with plans for escape.

The slave—his name was Dave Andrews—took me to his quarters, a miserable room not far from the Temple. There, I stripped out of both spacesuits and donned one of his loincloths.

"You look a little pale," he commented. "But otherwise I guess you can pass, if no one looks too closely for the generator that isn't planted in your side."

I looked ruefully at my discarded blaster. "I'm going

to feel lonely without that thing on my hip."

Andrews shrugged. "No slave would dare carry one. You'll just have to do without it until this is all over."

"All right," I said. "Let's get going. The sacrifice should be starting soon, shouldn't it?" The image of Karen's body plummeting into a lake of neutrons drifted into my mind, and I winced.

"Within the hour," he said.

Together we crossed the plaza that led to the massive Temple. No one seemed to notice us; apparently slaves were utterly beneath contempt in Lanargon. At the Temple door, a cross-hatched alien face confronted us, saw that we were slaves, and let us through.

"I'll have to help out at the ceremony," Andrews said. "You can come along. It'll give you your chance of getting close to the High Priest. And remember the way you came. You'll have to get out of here and into your ship later."

"Don't worry," I said stolidly. "I'll manage. I've never wanted to destroy anything so much before in my life."

We entered an elevator which was already occupied by a gigantic alien in luminescent yellow robes. I saw Andrews bend and touch his forehead to the floor without a moment's hesitation, and, much as it went against the grain, I did the same.

"The High Priest," he explained softly.

I nodded. I had guessed as much.

We rode the elevator to the sixty-first floor. As we got out, the priest said, "Bring the sacrifice to the Hall of the God, slaves."

We bowed again, and turned off down a long aisle. My heart leaped as Andrews entered a room guarded by two aliens and said, "High Priest requests delivery of the sacrifice to the Hall of the God."

One of the aliens nodded curtly and pointed toward an inner door. Andrews opened it and said quickly, "Prisoner, we have come to take you to the God." He stepped inside and clapped a hand over her mouth, stifling the cry that broke from her as she recognized me in the guise of a slave.

We closed the door, shutting out the alien guards.

"Karen," I said.

Andrews turned away and I folded her in my arms. She was quivering from anxiety and terror, though I saw her making an effort to recover

her nerves. She couldn't. I didn't blame her as she broke down and started to sob.

A gong sounded loudly.

Gently, Andrews said, "We'll have to go."

"Mike? Mike—are they going to do this thing to me?"

I looked at her. She was wearing what was probably the sacrificial gown, a clinging, translucent thing through which I could easily see her naked body beneath. "Don't worry," I said. "I'll get us out of it."

We led her along the hall, Andrews grasping one arm and I the other, while one of the alien guards walked before us and one behind. We walked for what seemed to be miles through the temple building, until we reached a door some twenty feet high. It swung open as we approached.

I gasped. We stood at the entrance to a great amphitheater, with an immense dais and rows of seats stretching off into the misty distance. And—between the dais and the seats—there was an open pit that seemed to reach down into the bowels of the planet. I looked down and reeled dizzily at the sight of that bright lake of radiation hundreds of feet below—the lake into which Karen's naked body was soon to be hurled.

"You lead her up there," Andrews whispered to me. "Give her to the High Priest. From there it's up to you. I'm going to go back and get an elevator ready in case you do get out of it alive. Move as fast as you can when you get away."

I nodded imperceptibly and marched forward with Karen. The great hall was filled—packed with row on row of uncountable aliens, sitting in quiet anticipation of the sacrifice to be performed before their eyes. Television cameras blinked down like unmoving eyes, telling me that the rest of the aliens were undoubtedly watching too.

I saw the robed figure of the High Priest, stark and majestic on the dais. He was intoning prayers to which the aliens responded antiphonally. A gong sounded repeatedly somewhere in the distance, and flames licked up from the abyss below.

He gestured for the sacrifice to be brought forward. I tightened my grip on Karen's arm and started to walk up the long row of steps that led to the dais. The chanting of the multitude rose to an agonizing volume, a savage beat of barbaric fury echoing

round and round the great hall.

I was at the heart of it now —the center of life of the race that set itself against all mankind. I clenched and unclenched my fists in anticipation as I traversed the long span of steps.

I handed over Karen. The priest took her and in one swift motion ripped away her thin gown, revealing her naked to the crowd. She began to cry. I muttered a silent curse. Hatred was a red haze before my eyes.

He took her in his giant hands and grasped her around the waist with those two slimy tentacles. The gong sounded furiously, and he responded to it with booming incantations. He lifted Karen's unprotesting body high over his head, prepared to hurl it into the open abyss—

And I charged forward and snatched her from him just as he was about to release her. We stood there, he and I, on the dais, while a shocked multitude waited for him to strike me dead.

I saw him lower his arm to his side and press a button in his robe—presumably the button that would activate the death-dealing device embedded in my body. Only I wore no such thing. He stared at me in an agony of exasperation as I unbelievably refused to die.

Then I advanced toward him. No one dared move. He bellowed something, and guards broke from their lethargy and started racing up the dais—but it was a long way to go.

He shouted and leaped at me. I felt his powerful hands encircling me and shoving me toward the abyss. I broke loose, hearing Karen's screaming as a dim noise in the background, and shoved backward. He reeled and groped for the blaster at his side. Before he could use it, I dropkicked it from his hand and sent it flying in a gleaming arc up, out, and into the pit.

He turned in utter dismay and watched it disappear. His face was a mask of despair and sheer horror. The guards were drawing near us, now.

I moved in close and unleashed a barrage of punches. He countered with wild swipes of his tentacles. I could hear Karen yelling clearly now, "They're coming! They're coming!"

With coolness born of complete desperation, I reached out and seized him around the waist. I strained to lift the three-hundred-pound body

from the ground, pulled, yanked, and heaved him high out over the abyss, a pinwheeling figure of arms and legs and tentacles. He screamed all the way down.

I turned and saw Karen crouching behind me, scooped her up, and we began to run. "This way!" I heard a slave cry, and he pushed the guard nearest him down into the abyss as well. A moment later he had crumpled into death himself, but he had saved us —whoever he was. We plunged through the door and out into the corridor.

Everywhere we saw slaves battling with the alien masters. They were dying, of course—as fast as the aliens could kill them—but they were clearing a path to the elevator for us. Andrews was waiting there.

Tears were in his eyes. "Great," he said. "Wonderful! But now get into your ship and get out of here *fast*."

We made our way through a confused mob of aliens and slaves. The stunned aliens seemed helpless with their High Priest dead. We pushed through them, the three of us, and cut through to the ship. We paused for a moment at the base of the catwalk. I glanced at Andrews.

"I'm not coming," he said, forestalling my question. "There's no point to it. I'm a dead man the second I leave the Dome. Go on—get going."

"We'll never forget you," I said. I boosted Karen up the catwalk and followed behind her. We made it inside safely, and the hatch clanged closed.

"Get into your acceleration cradle," I shouted, and leaped for the control panel. I set up a manual pattern for blastoff.

Out the viewport I could see the aliens coming to life, moving toward us in a mighty horde. I finished fumbling with the controls and heaved downward on the blasting stud just as a couple of them began to scale the fins of the ship.

The ship leaped skyward in an instant. In three seconds, we burst through the dome and out into space. Acceleration hit me like a gigantic fist, and I slumped over and blacked out.

The next thing I knew Karen was bending over me and lifting me to my feet. "We're safe," she said.

I rubbed my head and nodded. "And we took them all with us. It must have been something down there when the ship broke through the dome and sent their atmos-

phere whipping out into space. It's a lousy way to die —but they deserved it. All but those poor slaves. They were dead either way, though."

"Come look out the port," Karen said.

I did. I stared down at the bright, boiling radioactive fury that lit up the blackness of space where the dark planet should have been.

"It must have been that blaster," I said after a long pause. "The one I kicked into the radiation lake. When it reached the reactor at the bottom, it must have blown the roof off."

"They must have been destroyed in an instant."

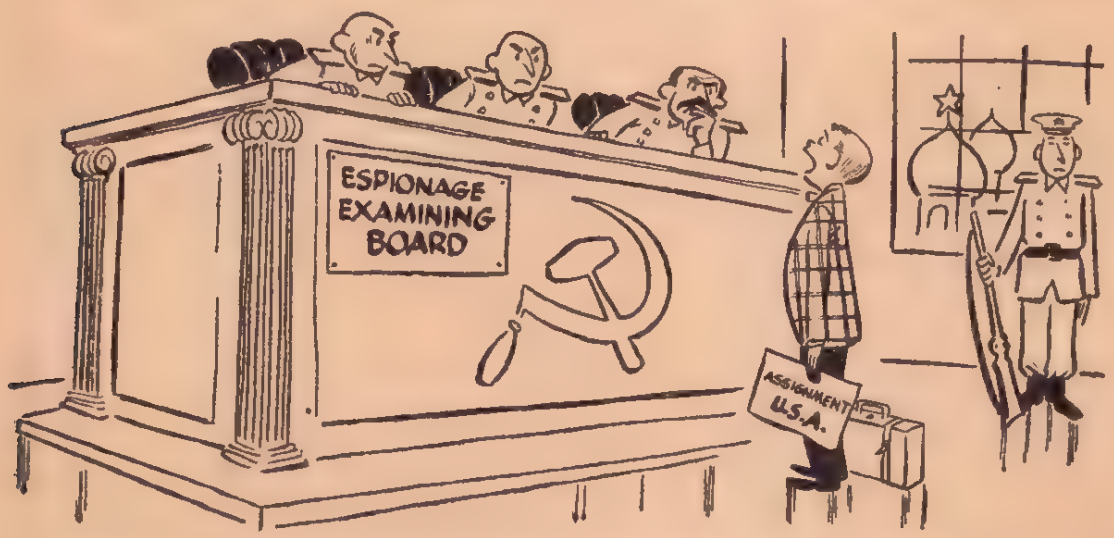
I looked at the beacon outside the viewport. "It's the end of the dark planet," I said slowly. "We've touched off a chain reaction that will last forever."

"Forever," she repeated. "It's all over now."

"I don't think we'll ever forget Lanargon," I said. "But I'd like to know what the galaxy's astronomers are going to say when they notice a brand-new sun in this part of the cosmos."

"They'll have all sorts of wild guesses. But we can tell them the right answer, can't we?"

"Yes," I said. I glanced once more at the fissioning hell that had been Lanargon, shuddered, and set our course for Earth. **THE END**



"In 1927 Babe Ruth hit 60 home runs, Bob Feller struck out 348 men in 1946, Ty Cobb stole 96 bases in 1915, Casey Stengel was a left-handed dentist in Kansas City, Mo. . . ."

POPULAR BOATING

JANUARY BOAT SHOW ISSUE

THE WORLD'S FIRST COMPLETE MARINE DIRECTORY

ILLUSTRATED LISTINGS
LATEST MODELS
LATEST PRICES

NOW ON SALE EVERYWHERE!

The Commander died in flight. This posed a question: What could they do with his body? The main problem, though, was what to do with themselves—the rest of the crew; with all——

THE DEAD COMPANIONS

By STANLEY MULLEN

LOG, Date June 11, 2341, 1600 hours (Earth)

Ship proceeding on rescue mission (File J337b5) as scheduled. Location: Nowhere. Remarks: None.

Cannon, commanding (succeeding Horsley).

There it was. Horsley was dead. As next in line, Cannon took over. Unemotionally, the rules said. And somewhere out in the dark, empty reaches of desolation near the edge of the galaxy, where stars thin out and space pushes back hard, the ship crawled along. All motion was relative, not apparent. Stars stood still. Suspended in the emptiness between them, the ship seemed as immobile as an insect solidified within a cosmic block of black amber. It seemed to hang there, motionless, as if coming from nowhere, going nowhere.

Horsley was dead. When you lose friends in space, you never lose them completely. On Earth, professionals move in and take over, there is dignified ceremony, then loss and forgetting. In deep space, nothing is ever so simple. Imagine ten men in a box. A ship-shaped box. Emotions are as concentrated as dehydrated soup.

With no professional body-handlers available, no morticians or mourners, somebody has to do the job. Disposal is a serious problem. Just put outside an airlock, the body would follow the ship indefinitely, hanging outside the ports (actually viewscreens) between the ship and

There was nothing for the men but boredom. The controls did everything but dust themselves off.

stars. Pulverized organic matter can be used to fertilize the hydroponic gardens, but breathing air so recycled and eating fresh plants nourished by corpses is impossible. A sensitive soul recalls cannibalistic legend. Not even atomic waste converters help much, since there is always leakage, and those dancing motes in the air might be an old friend, a missing shipmate.

Ceremony is meager. You sit around with the rest of the ship's company. Before you, under a fabplast cover, on the deep-freeze slab, lies an iron-hard, frost-rimed something which might be a curiously flattened statue of someone you knew. One by one, in turn, the men speak, recalling moods and incidents, some tragic, some gently comic, some poignantly nostalgic and others ridiculous or heroic, or both. You know what is under that covering, but you do not look at it and try not to think of it. You can recall many things, but you cannot recall the dead.

Cannon did not join the others at the rite. He could not, and the whole thing seemed barbarous to him. His feeling for Horsley was no greater nor any less than theirs, but to him Horsley was dead, and that was the end of it. Or, almost the end.

In the great, dark deeps of space, the ship must go on, life must go on. Horsley was dead, Cannon took over, the mission went on. As psycho-officer, which duty he now combined with his command, Cannon knew that routine must not be neglected. Robots actually operated the ship, essential machinery was automatic, electronic brains supervised, checked instruments, ran calculations, held course, and made decisions. But day duty of imaginary tasks and nominal supervision was chiefly for morale, of psychological value. Knowledge that the ship could exist and function as well unmanned was not good for the crew's minds.

Nor for the commander's, or psycho-officer's, thought Cannon grimly.

Out there was a planet, unnamed, unlisted. Some time back a ship had gone down on that planet and stayed there. Nobody knew what had happened, and it was anyone's guess if there had been survivors, and if any still lived. So somebody had to investigate, to find the survivors if any and if necessary and if possible, and to rescue them

if they wanted to go home. Ticklish judgments would be required, and not of the kind electronic brains could make. This was Cannon's job.

He hated his job, not because of its responsibilities, but because of the lack of them. He hated the tedium and tensions of space. He nursed his hatred, since a man must hate or love something greatly to exist at all where only a double-shell of thin metal separates him from the black edge of infinity.

Hell! With everything but the important decisions and reactions of life made for you, how could you know if you were ready for your private appointment with destiny? The answer to that was simple, fatal. You never knew till it was too late. . . .

Cannon swore volcanically. It was the sole outlet for his frustrations, for his feeling of untried inadequacy. In his heart, he longed for the good old days when men ventured space less well-equipped, astrogating by the seats of their pants, powering leaky tincans with chemical fuels, feeling their way blindly, but still poking a nervy way into the great unknown. Nowadays—

Mass detector alarms rang through the ship, echoing up and down laddered wells. Red lights blinked on the instrument panel in Controls, repeating themselves luridly in crimson washes that followed circling corridors. Relays clicked. Printed circuits and magnetic stimuli went into action, clifflike banks of vacuum tubes warmed up and delved into electronic memories. Amplifiers built up minute impulses. Complicated complexes uncomplicated complexities, and Laocoon layouts translated impulses into actions. Orders on metallic tapes spewed forth, and automatic machines obeyed them blindly, inhumanly.

For appearances sake, he went into the control room and looked around, awed by the paraphernalia of automation. Masses of robot machinery stupified him, and he felt bitterly resentful of electronic brains which solved problems without understanding them. There was nothing here for him to do, and not even a comfortable place to sit. Dust covered the universally-mounted pilot's chair.

But there was no place else to go, no place where he was needed, no place he wanted to be. He sat down, uncomfortable in body and mind. Resentment was good for

him, he suspected, acting like a catalyst in his mind. He should give in to it more often. Not-thinking was dangerous. The human mind is not made for that job.

He wondered if Horsley had ever sat here, had ever chafed at the frustrations of command, had ever been tempted by unconventional thoughts. Not Horsley, of course. A good man, a fine man, a commander who would have unquestioningly given his life to save his men. But that unquestioning mind was the key to Horsley's life. An automaton of flesh and blood, never debating an order even with himself, never doubting the almighty intelligence and rightness of all authority, never dodging responsibility, but never acting without the weight of orders through channels to back him up.

Horsley. Cannon had been extremely fond of him, had admired his tact and sincerity, but had sometimes doubted his reality. No such paragon could exist. But Horsley had existed, had lived and died as a man. There was proof of that, back on the deep-freeze slab.

Sooner or later, the corpse must be disposed of with proper dignity. Not from laziness, Cannon had postponed thinking about it. Death was final enough. One should simply disintegrate and disappear, physically as well as spiritually. It was undignified and degrading to leave a stinking carcass behind, and expect people to slobber over it. It was indecent, and one of the few things about which Cannon preferred not to think.

When his time came, he hoped he could figure a better way out. In the meantime, when he gave the matter thought, he would figure a clean way out for Horsley. For his body, rather. Cannon refused to connect the two.

Cannon wondered ironically why the electronic brains could never solve problems like what to do with dead bodies, and why live ones behaved as erratically as they did. Did the working parts of the great devices lack some vital component? Did they ever have erratic thoughts and impulses? He wondered what the great brains thought about when they were off duty, if their inhuman memory banks and stimuli reactions ever went off-circuit or had bad dreams.

Cannon's eyes roamed the control room, the panels of gauges, the visible consoles

of the brains, the access hatches to repair the robot machinery. Very intricate and beautiful, after a completely non-human fashion. Functional, in the best sense of the word. But what was man's function? He must have one, or the machines would not let him exist. No robots with caricatured human forms, like the absurdities of the viewscreen plays. No robots taking over humanity, enslaving it. Just the batteries of automatic machines, taking over man's work, man's responsibilities. Making man not a slave, but a drone. Man exsited, like drone insects, for the vital purpose of creating machines. And more drones like himself.

Before Cannon spread the console of manual controls. Manual controls, yes. Here only for emergency, just as the crew of men were standby technicians, in case the machines broke down. But did the machines decide what was emergency, or did he? And how would Cannon know emergency if the machines forgot to tell him?

They were nearing the planet. Instruments told Cannon as much about that as they thought it was good for him to know. He glared sourly at the emotionless gauges. As automatically as the machines and the electronic brains behind them, his mind translated bluntly indicated facts into related factors of time and distance and mass-power-ratio formulae. But the brains had done that long ago. Done it much faster and more accurately than Cannon could, with less margin for error.

Letting his mind and imagination drift off-course, he debated briefly what the crew would think if he simply shut-off all automatic machinery, disconnected the brains, and ignored the robot piloting devices. He could take the ship in on the manual controls.

He wondered what the machines would think about that. If they had built-in directives and devices to deal with recalcitrant humans like him. He wondered what means they would use to thwart his rebellious impulses, if gigantic hands like lobster claws would reach out from the cogs and coils to manacle and subdue him. If he would merely be confined to quarters under electric-eye guard, or if some kind of trial would be held. If the machines would direct the verdict and sentence him to

some fate more grim and inhuman than themselves. How could you bribe or misdirect as unfeeling a jailor as a selenium-cell?

Somebody came along the corridor and into the control room, his human footsteps clanging along the metal deck as inhumanly as mechanical sounds. It was young Timmins.

Neither man spoke for a while. Cannon glanced up sharply. Timmins was nerving himself. Silence stretched thin and snapped.

"What happened, exactly, Skipper?"

On ship, in space, there was little formality. In port, or during planetfall or blastoff, sometimes a great deal too much.

"You mean Horsley? I don't know," Cannon admitted frankly. "Maybe we'll never know. What did Doc say?"

"Too much or not enough. My guess is, he doesn't know."

"In that case, we can stop wondering. Doc knows everything there is to know about the human body. I'm supposed to know something about the mind. Everything except what it is, why it works, and how. Neither Doc nor I know anything about people. Your problem is just too simple for Doc and me. Like asking astrophysicists about instinct in ants. Crossing gulfs of space in robot spaceships does weird things to people. Some people die of it."

"Is that all?"

"Isn't that enough? The man's dead. We don't know why. Lots of people die, for a variety of reasons. Doc, and a lot of other good sawbones, uses the term heart-failure. He means that the heart stopped, but he doesn't say that the man died because his heart stopped, and he doesn't say that the heart stopped because he died. It's just a skillful lie to confuse the issue. Doc says heart failure. I say heartbreak. Sometimes you don't want life on the terms you can get. Would you want a job a machine can do better?" His bitterness was apparent.

"I work in hydroponics. You know that."

"I know it. You work with living things. In my own job as psycho-officer, so do I. But here, I'm not too sure of the distinction. When machines start thinking, and take time off to wipe my nose for me, I wish I could be sure they weren't alive. Or that I am.

As captain, I'm not a man, I'm a mechanic on call."

Timmins smiled awkwardly. "If I were the psycho-officer, I'd say you were neurotic, sir."

"And you'd be right. We're all neurotic. Since I am still psycho-officer, I reserve the right to be more neurotic than any of the rest of you. It's an occupational disorder —and necessary to understanding your complaints. Have you ever had claustrophobia, Timmins?"

"Fear of being closed in? No, sir. The opposite, maybe. Sometimes it bothers me to look at the viewscreens and see the space and stars outside. All that nothing everywhere, and us in the middle of it. Even the stars seem smaller out here, not real and solid enough, as if they didn't mean much of anything when you look at them from the middle of nowhere. Makes me feel ant-high to a large elephant."

"I know what you mean, and I'm way ahead of you. At home, on Earth or Mars, I liked to look up at the stars; here, they're always looking down at me. And there are worse things ahead. Wait till you get back from this voyage and find that everyone you knew is a lot older in proportion. I got a nastier shock every time I went back. So I don't go back if I can help."

"I've noticed most people in the outposts feel like that. Some go back twice. A few, three times. Nobody more. I don't ever want to go back. Once you pull up roots, you might as well keep going."

Cannon lit a cigarette and watched smoke curl upward to the refresher outlets.

"Sure," he muttered. "Keep going, but where? A thousand planets, all more or less little Earths. Earth people. Some big colonies, some small. You find at least one Earth-type planet in nearly every system. We take it over and make a place more like Earth than Earth ever was. They get old after a while. We get old. But we keep going, looking for something new, exploring to the ragged limits of our technology. What are we looking for, and why?"

"Not adventure, skipper?"

"Is that the reason you joined up?"

"Not exactly, I hope. I had that idea first. That's gone now, and I'm not sure I have anything to replace it."

"Have you found anything new to look at? Anything worth a second look?"

Timmins smiled brightly,

stubbornly. "Yes, sir. I think so. A kid's game, maybe. Every day I look at myself in the mirror and find out something about myself. And I keep discovering things about the other crewmen that I never dreamed was there. Things worth a second look and second thought."

"Lucky man," Cannon observed cynically. "Still bright-eyed and wonderful with youth. I envy you. In my mirror I always find things about myself I don't like."

Timmins abruptly changed the subject, or thought he did.

"About him, sir? Captain Horsley? What are we going to do with him?"

"With the body, you mean." It was not a question, not a reprimand for muddled thinking.

And there it was. Horsley was now only an embarrassment to his shipmates. Not even a deep memory, like recall tanks in the electronic brains. Just a name, or a word. Meat on the table. Nothing else mattered.

"The men are beginning to wonder, sir."

"Then they're through talking about him and thinking about their own solemn and painful emotions?"

"Quite through, sir. They thought, perhaps, if it would not take too much fuel—"

"We can't spare fuel, Timmins. I've thought about it and much as the rest of you. And our overlords, the machines, have worked it out in their hot-wire-in-vacuum minds. We can't waste fuel on this mission."

"I'm sorry about that, sir."

"No sorrier than I am." Cannon eyed his subordinate grimly. "Fortunately, there is a decent, dignified solution."

"We were counting on you, sir."

"I know. But not very hard, any of you. But I am the captain; by default, maybe, but still in command. You heard the alarms. We're approaching Planet X. Another dull, monotonous Earth-type planet, but for us, the big unknown. When we get back, it will have a number, a name, and reliable co-ordinates. Right now, we're still in free fall, coasting you might say, at full velocity. If we put the body out an airlock now—"

Timmins paled slightly. "If you say so, sir."

"Don't worry, it won't be with us too long. It won't embarrass us by hanging outside viewscreens. We'll soon be decelerating. The body will go on ahead, at our present ship's speed. Nasty greeting

to possible survivors, except that friction will burn it up in the atmosphere, scattering fine gray ash over most of the planet. Cremation, actually."

Relief showed in Timmins' fresh, youthful face. "We should have thought of that ourselves."

"Men aren't used to thinking, Timmins. Machines do it for them. But modern man is not obsolete. We can live with the machines, but not by becoming machines. A man who can follow orders and do nothing else is a fool. That's the one thing machines can do better than man. If machines think about it, I'm sure they respect only the man who can think for himself, one with the guts to try outrageous, new, or different ideas and actions. Machines need men, but men who can diverge from the norm, tackle the untried channels, men who can discover or create. We can work with machines, but not unless we can work without them, not unless we understand the difference between machines and men."

Timmins ventured a shrug. "That's your department, not mine, sir. I guess I agree. But out here—"

"Out here, we have a corpse to get rid of," Cannon said irritably. "See to it. And don't think the future colonists of Planet X will worry about breathing that thinned-down ash in their air. They won't think about it. Spacemen die, and people forget. They'll forget us, too. Nobody cares who's body is pushing up his rosebushes. Nobody remembers the men whose bodies are following cometary orbits around nameless stars. Someday, they'll forget such people ever existed."

"Maybe it's better that way," Timmins agreed, but Cannon was not sure if the comment referred to the disposal of Horsley or the inevitable fate of brave men. He did not care.

"While you're at it," he went on savagely, "there's another thing you can tell the men. I'm disconnecting the brains and shutting off the robots. I'm taking the ship in by hand. I'm the captain, so I don't need a reason. Tell them anything you like—that I'm testing manual controls, that I'm wondering how the men will take such an action. Or wondering how the machines will take it."

"Is that the real reason, sir?" Timmins had brightened surprisingly.

"Actually, I'm doing it just because I want to. But I am

interested in seeing what happens . . ."

Nothing happened. Then. The mission was a success as far as it went. No rescue, as records state clearly. Cannon's crew found the survivors, a community which had long-since reverted to the primitive, where men chased each other with clubs and dragged their women about by handfuls of hair. They were contented enough, even happy, and using his judgment, Cannon left them that way. He gave them better weapons to use on each other, and instructed them in the contriving of simple agricultural implements. He left seed and good wishes, and abandoned them to the making of their own destiny. The Ethnological committee approved his decision: such people would definitely not fit in the civilized community.

At the investigation and during Cannon's trial, curious facts came out. Cannon's crew came back alive, without the fifty percent losses expected of such operations. Came back without space neuroses. And it was learned that except for Cannon's erratic decision to use manual controls, none would have come back at all. Equipment deteriorates rapidly in space, the brains and the robot-piloting mechanism were seriously out of adjustment and would have brought the ship to Planet X as a flame-in, fatal to both expedition and personnel.

After inevitable acquittal, Cannon was kicked upstairs, as a valuable man, but troublesome. He had ideas, and impulses, which would have doomed him in bureaucracy. But in space—

Cannon and Timmins went up to the dome of the great observatory on Luna, and looked out at the stars.

"I don't know why," Timmins mentioned soberly, "but the stars still look bigger from here. And I feel bigger."

"The stars are the same size," Cannon argued, "and so are you. Here. Out there, you're a lot bigger."

Timmins scowled with embarrassment. "I do think I grew up a little out there. After you took over the ship and brought through your mission, by hand. I realized suddenly that I had been very young when I joined-up, and that the kind of adventure I was looking for never really existed anywhere."

"You still want adventure, don't you? It's still out there, wherever we go, whatever we

do. Adventure is still what it's always been — just taking your fate in your two hands and going someplace to see what happens to you. Adventure is never dead, unless we are. But I think I know now what all of us are really looking for . . . out there."

"What's that, sir? Something big and mystical?"

"No, something very small, but very important to us," Cannon said, staring upward at the stars. "Ourselves . . ."

THE END

STATEMENT REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AS AMENDED BY THE ACTS OF MARCH 3, 1933, AND JULY 2, 1946 (Title 39, United States Code, Section 233) SHOWING THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION OF FANTASTIC published bi-monthly at Chicago, Illinois, for October 1, 1956.

1. The names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are:

Publisher, Ziff-Davis Publishing Company, 64 E. Lake St., Chicago 1, Ill.

Editor, Paul W. Fairman, 366 Madison Ave., New York 17, N. Y.

Managing editor, None.

Business manager, G. E. Carney, 366 Madison Ave., New York 17, N. Y.

2. The owner is: (If owned by a corporation, its name and address must be stated and also immediately thereunder the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, the names and addresses of the individual owners must be given. If owned by a partnership or other unincorporated firm, its name and address, as well as that of each individual member, must be given.)

Ziff-Davis Publishing Company, 64 East Lake St., Chicago 1, Illinois.

Estate of William B. Ziff, 366 Madison Ave., New York 17, N. Y.

A. M. Ziff, 366 Madison Ave., New York 17, N. Y.

B. G. Davis, 366 Madison Ave., New York 17, N. Y.

S. Davis, 366 Madison Ave., New York 17, N. Y.

3. The known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are:

Modern Woodmen of America, Rock Island, Illinois.

4. Paragraphs 2 and 3 include, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting; also the statements in the two paragraphs show the affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner.

5. The average number of copies of each issue of this publication sold or distributed, through the mails or otherwise to paid subscribers during the 12 months preceding the date shown above was: (This information is required from daily, weekly, semiweekly, and triweekly newspapers only.)

G. E. CARNEY,
Business Manager.

[SEAL]

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 24th day of September, 1956.

VICTOR C. STABILE,
Notary Public.

State of New York, No. 24-3800350. Qualified in Kings County. Certificate filed in New York County. Commission expires March 30, 1957.

SWORDS AGAINST THE OUTWORLDERS

By CALVIN KNOX

There were no more gray flannel suits in Westchester. The well-dressed executive now wore a bearskin and carried a club instead of a briefcase.

THERE was a tight-faced ring of scientists surrounding him. They made the final adjustments in the complex network of machinery, and a technician brought up a glowing helical coil that hovered over him.

"Are you ready?" asked the man at the switch.

"Ready as I'll ever be," Keith Brandston said.

"Here we go, then." The arm holding the switch tensed, moved forward, pushed down. Contact was made, and a man leaped forward in time.

Keith Brandston found himself fighting for his life

The swordsman decided to

lop off Branston's head first and ask questions later.

almost before the shadows had cleared from his eyes. The shock of the time-jump still gripped him as he heard a harsh voice shout in strange accents, "Stand and defend yourself, stranger!"

Brandston whirled instinctively and saw a squat, bearded man in a ragged loincloth, wielding a gleaming sword whose deadly blade was polished to mirror brightness.

Before he could do anything, another voice from behind him cried, "Hold back, Elvar! This man is mine!"

A quick glance backward revealed another man, taller and rangier, coming up over the edge of the hill on which Keith had suddenly materialized. He, too, brandished a sword. And Brandston was caught between them.

"I say he's mine," growled the squat, ugly man who had been addressed as Elvar. "Do you question it, Konrad?"

"I do," the taller man shouted. Without further hesitation he sprang forward, sword on high. Brandston narrowly avoided being impaled and cut to shreds as the two swordsmen came together with him in between.

He barely managed to duck out of the way in time, thinking that this time-jump to the future was a good bet to become a one-way trip. He had landed in what looked like a pretty unfriendly era.

The taller man brought his sword whistling down in a shining arc; Elvar managed to parry with a choppy movement of his thick wrist, and the meeting of the two swords produced a deafening *clang*. Brandston watched the two men locked in deadly combat, and then, deciding that this might be his only chance, decided to slip away unnoticed.

No such luck, though. Elvar apparently caught the motion out of the corner of his eye, for he cried in a mighty voice, without missing a stroke of the sword, "Hold, scoundrel! Let me finish off this knave and I'll deal with you. I will be but a minute."

Keith had no ideas of waiting; he was no coward, but facing unarmed a man with a broadsword was not his idea of an equal contest. However, Elvar was as good as his word. He disengaged his sword with a surprisingly agile motion, brought it skimming sideways through the taller man's guard, and sank it three inches into the side of his neck. A crimson fountain of blood spurted forth,

and the dead warrior slumped to the ground.

The conclusion of the duel had taken but a moment. And now Elvar turned to look for Keith.

"Where are you? Ah, you've run away, churl? By the Overlords, I'll have you for that!"

Holding the sword at his side, the burly warrior ran after Keith, who turned, and, seeing he had no chance of escape, determined that the only road to safety was through offense. Doubling back quickly on his own tracks, he raced up the side of the hill toward Elvar, swerved around the amazed swordsman, and continued on to the summit.

He reached the body of the defeated man, snatched the sword from the corpse's grasp, and turned, planting his legs firmly.

"All right, Elvar," he bellowed, as the other came grunting up the mountainside. "Now I'll fight you on equal grounds!" He hefted the sword, and waited for the other's approach.

Two days before, things had been more peaceful. The time-jump was the product of eight years' studies and hard work on the part of a staff working in secret under Government auspices. Keith Brandston, who had been picked to make the first voyage to the future, spent his time in quiet seclusion, far from the madhouse of white-smocked technicians and eagerly snooping reporters who clustered around Locksley Hall, the big Columbia University building which housed the project.

Brandston had been taken to Red Bank, New Jersey, to a small house just outside of town. He had been picked from among the members of Project Time-Jump on the basis of his high level of intelligence and his exceptional physical aptitudes; at six-four, with an athlete's body and a physicist's mind, Brandston would be able to cope with any eventuality he might encounter during his journey into time.

They had secluded him shortly before the day of his departure, to allow him to rest for the journey, the idea being to have him in the sharpest possible shape when the time came to leave. And so he'd been alone, with a few books and a small armed guard.

So far as he knew, he was making the trip alone. For a while, it had seemed possible

that lovely Rhona Donavan, one of the female technicians involved in Project Time-Jump, would be sent also, but the last information Brandston had was that the redhead's trip had been nixed, on the general grounds that the unknown future was too risky a place for a woman.

Brandston had been annoyed at that. For one thing, he had dated Rhona occasionally, and liked her more than a little; her company on the voyage would have made the whole thing considerably more appealing. For another, he *knew* Rhona Donavan—and he knew that she could come out of any risk in fairly good shape. She was like him in that respect: she could improvise, act on the spot, use her head in a flash. No other woman Brandston could think of was better qualified for the trip—and few men.

But the decision came through, and Brandston was informed that he was making the trip alone. He had shrugged his shoulders regretfully, and that had been that.

The next day, a bulletproof sedan conveyed him from New Jersey to upper Manhattan, and, heavily guarded, he entered Locksley Hall on the Columbia campus.

Exactly an hour later, a switch was thrown, a blue light flickered warningly, the air crackled with subetheric power, and Keith Brandston was hurled forward, alone and unarmed, into Earth, A.D. 6958.

The squat, almost ape-like man of the future named Elvar moved cautiously up the side of the hill, glaring menacingly at Brandston.

Keith grasped the heavy sword tighter and waited grimly, thinking, *Is this what's happened to Mankind in five thousand years? Has evolution turned backward?*

Then there was time for no further thought, as the stubby warrior leaped forward. The sword swung up in the air and descended.

Keith, moving strictly from reflex, parried with a backhanded swipe. The other's sword slid away to one side, cleaving the air viciously next to Brandston's ear.

"I'll have you yet, stranger!" Elvar grunted.

"Not so soon, fat one," responded Brandston, and he launched his own assault.

He had nearly a foot's height advantage on the other, which made up, he hoped, for Elvar's greater skill with the sword. Keith had fenced in college, and

done well—but that had been with a pencil-thin epee, not a clumsy broadsword such as the one he now held.

Brandston took one step forward, and Elvar gave ground. Then Keith flicked out the sword in a tentative jab; Elvar parried ringingly, sending a jolt of pain up Brandston's arm, but Keith returned the gesture with a quick lunge that penetrated Elvar's guard and cut a thin red line along the small man's hairy chest.

"Not good enough, large one," Elvar taunted. Keith saw that the swordsman's body was scarred and recrossed with the evidence of many wounds; Elvar was tough, beyond a doubt. Making epee-like touches would only wear Keith out, and apparently skin wounds wouldn't bother Elvar at all.

Keith drove forward a second time, this time hoping to beat down the other's guard and land a decisive thrust, but to his surprise Elvar parried his most powerful drive with ease and retaliated with a swinging, slashing attack of his own.

Brandston backed up. He was sweating profusely in his lab smock and business suit, and longed for the freedom that the man of the future, in his abbrebviated loincloth, enjoyed. He beat off Elvar's attack with desperate strength and hung back, gasping for breath. His stomach was a cold ball of nerves, and in his brain burnt the necessity of driving Elvar back.

The small man's sword ventured within an inch of Keith's throat, and he fought it back. Then, driving with a vigor born of impending defeat, Keith raised his sword high overhead in a two-handed grip and brought it down with stunning impact near the hilt of Elvar's weapon.

The squat man gasped a curse as his sword went flying from his hand. He stood there, grasping his numbed arm, and spat bitterly at Keith.

"You have me, big man," he growled. He pointed to the bloody body of his earlier adversary, lying in a neglected heap not far away. "Well, why don't you strike?"

Keith stared in amazement. Elvar was obviously waiting to be killed! He was standing unarmed, making no attempt to recover his weapon, openly expecting Keith to plunge his sword cold-bloodedly into his bosom.

"Strike?" Keith said. "I don't want to kill you."

Elvar laughed. "But I would have killed you! Go—go—strike, and get it over. Don't taunt me."

Brandston shook his head. "Why should I kill you?"

"You defeated me, didn't you? What else is there to do?"

Keith frowned. In a way, Elvar was right. He had won a duel to the death, and the only thing remaining was the *coup-de-grace*. This wasn't a college fencing society; it seemed to be a rough, fierce, primitive world where might meant right.

But yet—to kill a man coldly—

Keith shook his head.

"What are you waiting for?" Elvar demanded.

"I do not intend to kill you," Keith said.

"What?" Elvar's jaw dropped. "Give me back my sword, then."

"I don't intend to let you kill me either," Keith said. "But your life is more valuable to me than your corpse. I'm a stranger in this world, alone and without companions. If you'll swear allegiance to me, I will return your sword."

"Allegiance? Companions?" Elvar said wonderingly. "These are not words I hear often. Among my people, each man is alone. We kill, or we are killed. It is the rule."

Keith frowned. Elvar seemed to prefer death to defeat.

"You have enemies?" Keith asked.

Elvar looked up, grinning gap-toothedly. "Every man has enemies," Elvar said. "You are toying with me."

"Listen carefully," said Keith. "Join with me, and protect me from my enemies, and I'll protect you from yours. We will be—together."

The concept sank slowly into Elvar's mind. Brandston saw the other man wrestling with the idea of cooperation, of willing sparing of an enemy. Then his eyes brightened.

"You really do not want to kill me," Elvar said with conviction. "I—I believe you, stranger."

"Do you accept my offer?"

Elvar knelt, and looked up humbly—as humbly as a proud man could possibly look. He reached out and put his hands on the naked blade of Brandston's sword.

"We are—friends," Elvar said. "I swear it."

He rose, squared his shoulders, and smiled. "Now give me my sword."

Keith surveyed Elvar's eyes for a long moment, won-

dering whether this was some sort of trap. But after a deep examination, he decided that the man of the future spoke in sincerity. He handed Elvar his sword. Elvar knelt again.

"Rise," Keith commanded. He was past his first obstacle in what proposed to be a pretty harrowing ten days.

Elvar rose, and silently slipped his sword into the leathern scabbard dangling at his hip.

"Now, tall and powerful one," Elvar said, "tell me who you are and where you are from. There will be great rejoicing tonight when they learn that Elvar has been beaten by a stranger."

Keith leaned on his sword, reflecting that if he hadn't managed to disarm Elvar he'd probably be lying next to the other corpse on the hill, never to return to his proper time.

"Your name and lineage," Elvar demanded.

"Brandston," Keith said. "Son of Brandston. I come from — beyond the Great River," he said, meaning the river of Time and hoping that Elvar would interpret it as whatever river happened to be in the neighborhood.

Which brought up another problem. The start of the journey had been in the heart of urban New York. Keith was aware that the time-jump would involve some geographical shift as well as temporal displacement, but there was not the slightest sign of civilization anywhere nearby. The hill they stood on was heavily wooded, and spreading out before them was a thickly-forested lowland. Cities, houses, people—nothing. Off in the distance, Keith spotted a sprinkling of gray tents, each far removed from its neighbor, and some bluish campfire smoke curling to the sky, but he might very well have gone backward five thousand years instead of forward, for all the evidence of progress to be seen.

"My tent is over there," Elvar said, pointing off into the lowlands. "I am hunting deer, and they run thick here in the springtime. But there has been much fighting. They scatter."

"I come from far off," Brandston said. "I do not understand your ways. Where is your city?"

"City?" Elvar said. He grinned, then burst into laughter.

"I must have said something funny," said Brandston.

"City," Elvar repeated, still enjoying the joke. "From how

far off do you come, Brandston, that you talk of cities? Strange words indeed."

"A great distance," Keith said mysteriously. "So far away that you could not reach it in a year's journey or more."

"I have heard of such places," said Elvar. "Come, then; we will go to my tent, and I will tell you about the cities."

Elvar led the way, and Keith followed as they descended the green hill and headed into the lowlands. They were in a heavy stand of virgin timber, Keith noticed; no one had done any logging in the area in centuries. Was all civilization at a standstill? It looked that way.

"The cities, my friend," Elvar said, "are places of fear. We are the Free People, and we live in the open land between the cities. It is a hard life and a dangerous one, but at least we are our own masters." Elvar's lip curled in scorn. "Do you have Outworlders in your part of the world?"

Outworlders! Keith's heart skipped a beat. What terrible thing had happened to Earth, he asked himself?

Out loud, maintaining external calmness, he said, "They have not reached us yet."

"You are truly fortunate," Elvar said. "Our cities have been in their grip as long as man can remember. They do not bother us of the Free People—but we know they are there, and the knowledge is painful."

Keith frowned. "Tell me more of these things, Elvar."

"You *are* ignorant," the squat man commented. "I see I'll have to explain all to you. Come," he said. "Here's a stream." He pointed to a clear blue brook that wound through the trees. "Let us bathe here, and wash away the toil of battle, and then we shall eat. After that I shall tell you things."

Elvar wriggled out of his loincloth and strode into the stream, while Keith stood guard. "I'm glad to have a companion, for at least one reason," said Elvar, as he gaily splashed water over his muscular, hairy body. "It is too dangerous to wash when one is alone. A naked man is a dead one if anyone comes along."

Keith peered apprehensively around, listening for noises behind the trees. Elvar grinned when he saw it. "Don't worry too much now," he

called. "Konrad was the only other hunter in the vicinity, and he's back there now." He jerked his head toward the direction of the hill and the unburied corpse.

After a few moments more, Elvar grunted in satisfaction and climbed out of the stream. He stretched for a moment, shook himself dry, and donned his loincloth again.

"That was good," he said. "Now it is your turn."

He picked up his sword and assumed guard post on the bank of the stream. Keith looked at him uneasily for a moment, still not sure whether or not to trust him, and then decided to risk it. He dropped his sword and undressed.

"You have fine muscles," Elvar commented approvingly when Keith stood naked. "But your body is pale. You have not lived in the forests." He peered suspiciously at Keith. "Are you a runaway from the cities, pretending to be—No," he answered himself. "By the Overlords, no renegade could fight the way you do!"

Keith grinned. "I *am* a city man," he said. "But my city is far from here, and knows no Outworlders."

The cool waters of the swift-flowing stream comforted him, sweeping away the perspiration of his recent duel and easing his strained muscles. When he felt fully relaxed, Keith left the water and dressed again, discarding his smock.

"You will not need that either," Elvar said, pointing to the jacket and shirt. "It is warm here, in the spring."

Keith nodded, remembering how the extra clothing had only hampered him in the fight, and threw the garments aside. Clad merely in trousers and shoes, he felt free.

"Let us go to my tent now," Elvar said. "I am hungry—and afterward, I will tell you what you wish to know."

He led the way through the forest to a small but adequate tent pitched in the shelter of a towering beech-tree. A dying fire smouldered in front of it, and hanging on a spit above the embers was the partly-cooked carcass of a deer.

Elvar quickly restored the fire to full vigor, and the pungent odor of venison roast filled the air.

They gorged hungrily for more than an hour, by which time the afternoon shadows had begun to fall. Then Elvar, leaning back and belching

happily, began to tell the history of his people. It was a chilling story.

The Outworlders had landed somewhere near what was, for Elvar, the dawn of time —at least two and possibly three thousand years earlier, Keith estimated. Elvar had seen an Outworlder only once in his life, and so could not describe them well, but his impression was that they were tall, slimy-skinned alien beings of repulsive appearance. They had marched triumphantly through the world, pillaging, burning, destroying. Earth's armies had been powerless before them.

They had firmly established themselves in every major city of the world, killing all of the inhabitants except an enslaved handful who were allowed to stay on as servants and menial laborers.

Many had fled the cities to safety. And, as the land between the great urban centers was given back to the jungle, Elvar's people arose: the Free People, a race of hardy, sword-swinging individualists with no government, no laws except the basic one that the strongest man lived longest. Arguments were settled by the sword. Life was hazardous and full of danger.

Under such circumstances, human civilization gradually slowed to a halt. The Overlords maintained an iron grasp over the cities and paid little attention to what went on in the jungles between; the Free People were too divided among themselves ever to be able to unite and lead an attack on the Overlords, while the spiritless captives who served the alien masters in their cities were beneath contempt, and worthy only of pity.

When the story was told, Elvar looked up sadly.

"This is how it is with us," he said. "Your land is not like this?"

Keith Brandston's lips firmed in sudden determination. "No—it is not," he said. "I have come across time—to lead the Free People into the cities, to destroy the Overlords and restore Earth's independence!"

Elvar grinned. "How do you plan to do that? Do you not think we would have done that long ago, had we been able to fight together?"

"There's no reason why you can't," Keith said. "I will be the rallying figure; slowly, with great patience, we will build an army and drive the Outworlders back to the skies."

"Strong words, Brandston," said Elvar, leaning back on the grass. "But you will never succeed. Let us spend our time trying to conquer the deer in this forest, rather; we will hunt together."

"Very well," Keith said, his ardor cooling. He paused to reflect, thinking about his bold determination to overthrow the Outworlders. They were, indeed, strong words—but he knew they were empty ones. One man could not lead a rebellion against masters who had ruled for thousands of years. And it was not his fight. These were his remote descendants, and it was their world—not his. He had no business coming from out of time to set things right. His job was back in what was now the past, living the life he had been born to, helping to set his own world right.

The time-scoop would pick him up in ten days. It was his duty to return, to explain to the people who had sent him what he had seen, to prove that the time-machine was a success. They had not sent him here to be king of a barbarian horde.

The more he thought about it, the more he saw how ridiculous his declaration was. His task was to learn as much about the world of 6958 as he could, and return—alive—to tell it. Keith Brandston was too precious to the world of 1958 to risk his neck swinging swords.

He was off to a good start, having made a valuable contact in Elvar. But overthrowing the alien conquerors was probably a lifetime job, and in any event it was no job for him.

He nodded. "You're right. We'll hunt together. Maybe we'll get a chance to kill a couple of the Outworlders too, before our time is come."

"I hope so," Elvar said. "But life is hard enough among us without your finding someone new to fight."

Brandston stared gloomily at the fire while the evening shadows slowly closed in, wrapping a cloak of darkness over the forest. Elvar sat on the other side of the fire, peering beady-eyed at the sparks, perhaps dreaming of a world rid of the alien masters, perhaps simply dreaming of the next day's hunting.

After an hour or so, Elvar rose. "Come," he said. "Let us sleep, and rise with the dawn. The deer will be running tomorrow, and we must be awake and after them."

"Good idea," Keith agreed.

They went inside the tent, which was fashioned from animal hides and gave off a musty, ancient odor. Elvar pointed out a heap of leaves and mosses at one side. "You sleep there," he said.

"But that must be your bed," Keith objected.

"You defeated me," Elvar reminded him. "This is your bed now."

Without further protest, Keith stretched out on the "bed," and Elvar lay down alongside him, sword within ready reach.

Keith was a long time falling asleep; for what seemed like hours, he lay awake, listening to Elvar's stertorous snoring and envying the barbarian his easy assurance and untroubled rest. Living under the threat of immediate death, year in and year out, as Elvar had, made one less apprehensive.

Finally, Keith managed to drop off into an uncertain slumber, from which he was awakened in the darkest part of the night by the sensation of a pair of cold hands wrapping themselves around his throat.

His first thought was one of treachery. Had Elvar betrayed him? He burst out with a half-strangled roar, and, rolling over, managed to break the hold. He felt his assailant groping for him in the dark.

Then he heard the stirring of a third figure somewhere in the tent, and realized that Elvar had not been unfaithful, but that some newcomer had attacked him.

"Elvar!"

"Ho, Brandston! Down with your sword!"

Keith felt a bunched fist thud into his stomach and winced with pain; he drove back with a sledgehammer blow and was rewarded with the sound of an agonized grunt.

"Get out of the tent, Elvar," he said. "It'll be easier to handle him."

The tentflap parted and silver moonlight trickled in, revealing a powerful, firm-fleshed man standing poised looking for trouble. He sprang as soon as he could see Brandston clearly, and Keith, sidestepping, sent him hurtling into the centerpole that supported the tent. It cracked and the flimsy structure came toppling down, covering both of them.

Wriggling uncertainly under the canvas, Keith moved toward the other, while the muffled, distant voice of Elvar shouted encouragement. Grop-

ing blindly, Keith seized the other man, found fingers, then an arm, and began to bend mercilessly. He struggled to an erect position, still holding the arm, and put his knee in the small of the other man's back. He pushed gently forward—enough to show he meant business.

"Okay, I've got him!" Keith called. "Get the tent off me, Elvar!"

He heard Elvar bustling around outside, pulling the tent away, and then they were in the open again. Brandston's prisoner glared sullenly at him.

"I know him!" Elvar declared suddenly. "It's Lodin the Hunter! Poor return for past friendship, Lodin, to attack a man while he sleeps."

"One must eat," the man addressed as Lodin said. "I have had bad hunting, and I have lost my sword. I did what I could."

Elvar looked expectantly at Keith, gripping his weapon. "Should I finish him off?"

Instantly Keith shook his head. "No — no killing, Elvar."

"What will you do with me?" Lodin asked.

"I want you to join us," Keith said. "We shall all hunt together, and protect each other from enemies—just as Elvar and I protected each other against you just now."

"Ho, a good idea!" Lodin said with amusement. "Better that we band together and storm Nyawk for the White Goddess of the Outworlders!"

"White Goddess?" Keith repeated. He glanced at Elvar. "You didn't tell me anything about her."

"It's the first I've heard," Elvar said.

"You know not of the White Goddess?" Lodin asked, incredulous. "She who came from nowhere during the winter, whom the Outworlders themselves worship? Ho, you must have been far from the paths of news!"

"I have been hunting a lonely trail," Elvar said. "Tell me about this White Goddess."

"I know only what the renegades from the Outworlder cities have told me," said Lodin. "She is a tall woman with flaming red hair, who dropped from the skies. The Outworlders found her, and they are keeping her in the Great Temple in Nyawk."

"Odd," Elvar said. "Brandston, here, dropped from the skies, too. The world is strange, Lodin."

The man named Lodin turned to stare superstitious-

ly at Brandston for a moment. "He has the strength of a demon," Lodin said quietly. "They say that she does, too."

Keith took no notice of what Lodin and Elvar said further. He had but one thought: *Rhona Donavan!*

A White Goddess dropping from the skies—a red-haired woman of great strength—

Brandston saw instantly what had happened. They had decided to send Rhona after all, in a second time-machine, some time after Keith had left. But, through design or through mischance, Rhona had arrived in the future *before* Keith—a year before, perhaps. And she had been living in the city of the Outworlders!

The lonely hooting of a far-off owl drifted through the dark night skies. Keith clenched and unclenched his fists. A moment before, he had dismissed, and for good reason, his grandiose plan to lead an assault on the Outworlder city. It seemed, at the time, mere foolish heroics.

But now he had a reason—a vital reason—for the attack. If what Lodin said were true, and not just some wild coincidence — then Rhona Donavan was a prisoner of the aliens, perhaps presiding over whatever loathsome rites the creatures practiced in the city they had stolen from the Earthmen.

Now his way was clear.

He turned back to Lodin and Elvar. Rising to his full height, he stared down at Lodin.

"Is this true, this talk of a White Goddess?"

Lodin shrugged. "It is true that I have heard. This is the best that I can say."

Brandston's eyes blazed. He hefted his sword. "Lodin, I'll offer you a choice—a choice between life and death. Join me, stand beside me as I drive my sword into Outworlder flesh—or die, now."

Lodin climbed to his feet, and extended one powerful arm. "You are a brave and strong man, Brandston. If you will fight the Outworlders, I will fight with you."

"And I too," said Elvar.

Brandston grinned in the darkness. The first glimmers of the sun were starting to creep up in the East, and in the beginning dawn he felt a deep inner confidence, a sense of calm faith in the growing strength of his right arm.

"How far is it to Nyawk?" he asked.

When morning came, they

broke camp, Elvar slinging over his back the remnants of the deer they had eaten the night before, and headed deeper into the forest.

Keith walked behind, studying the broad backs of his two vassals. He was aflame with determination now; all thoughts of the neat, antiseptic laboratory were buried under the five thousand years of time that separated him from his earlier self. He had one goal, now: to fight his way to the heart of the Outworlder city and rescue Rhona, before the time-scoop arrived to take them back.

There were nine days left. Lodin and Elvar had assured him that Nyawk was two days' march to the south—which put them, Brandston estimated, in the area that had once been Suffern, New York. He thought of the army of commuters that once had shuttled back and forth from Rockland County to Manhattan each day, wondering with grim amusement how they would feel if they knew that a mere five thousand years would blot out every trace not only of their existence but of the suburbs they had inhabited.

Two days' march to the south. Allow one day to assault the Outworlder city and rescue Rhona — he didn't dwell on the possibility of defeat—and six days remained. Six days to recruit, from these scattered barbarians, an army to challenge the might of the aliens who had conquered the Earth.

It was a tough order. But Keith Brandston felt equal to it. With buoyant spirits, he followed Elvar and Lodin into the jungle.

Later in the morning, they added a third to the growing army—a tall, blond-haired youth of twenty who was taken unawares in the forest, and impressed into the newly-formed army at the point of Elvar's sword. Once the idea of attacking Nyawk was explained clearly to him, his eyes brightened and he announced his happiness at taking part.

"There are men up ahead you might want," the youth told them. "A gathering, come together under one man's dominance. I went not near them for my own safety, but they looked like good fighters useful in a battle."

"Can you lead us to them?" Keith asked.

"I will," said the youth.

They struck off through the forest, and on the way Keith added a fourth, then a fifth

to his fledgling army. He noticed how the hatred that seemed to exist between all members of the Free People appeared to vanish as soon as the novel concept of uniting to fight the Outworlders was broached. Apparently the idea had not been thought practical enough even to consider, until Keith had come along.

"What? March against the Outworlders?" It was a giant of a man, nearly seven feet tall and probably three hundred pounds in weight, who spoke. "You're mad, stranger!"

Keith looked warily around. There were ten of them, apparently under the sway of this giant. This gathering was no concourse of peaceful men; it was a grouping of satellites around this fierce, red-bearded leader.

"The Outworlders can be destroyed," Keith insisted firmly. "We mustn't give up without trying." He paced up and down the cleaning in the forest where the group had established itself, kicking angrily at the filthy heaps of charcoal and chewed bones that lay everywhere.

"Listen to him," said a softer voice. Keith looked around. It was a woman—the first he had seen since entering this world of the future. She wore a deerskin cloak that left her breasts bare, and she was stretched languidly on the ground near the giant who dominated the group. She was, evidently, his property—and none too unhappy about the arrangement.

"I know what he's after," she went on raucously. "He's hunting for that White Goddess the Outworlders have."

There was a general hubbub of laughter at this. Keith scowled, acknowledging bitterly that the woman had indeed hit on part of the truth. His strongest motive in organizing the campaign was to recover Rhona from the grasp of the aliens. But that was not all; Keith hoped to organize these barbaric aliens, teach them unity and set them on the path toward civilization once again.

Striding boldly into the midst of the group, Keith pointed at the red-haired man. "What's your name?" he demanded.

"Zandenor," the giant said in a basso boom. "I'm the boss here."

"The boss?" Keith repeated, seizing on the word. "That means you've organized some sort of group here." He gestured at the ten men who surrounded him.

"I've beaten all these men," Zandenor said, with more than a little pride. "They hunt for me."

Keith grinned, and pointed to his own quintet standing to one side. "There are my men," he said. "I've beaten them."

"You are very mighty," Zandenor said mockingly.

"You don't understand," Keith persisted. "You and I—we've done something unusual. We've organized men, forced them to do our bidding. We're chieftains, you and I. Your men keep you supplied with food and women; mine share with me the desire to end the slavery imposed on us by the Outworlders. Why don't you join us?"

Zandenor took one heavy step forward. "Look, stranger: we don't bother the Outworlders, and they don't bother us. I don't intend to start a fight with them. I live very comfortably this way."

Keith frowned. He was boiling mad; Zandenor and his crew would be an invaluable nucleus for the army he needed, but here they openly refused to lift a hand against their ancient oppressors.

"Listen to me, Zandenor. You could have wealth, women, anything you wanted. You could have the cities to plunder! Only join with me!"

"No," the other leader growled. "It's dangerous to oppose the Outworlders. We live a free life here."

"Oho!" Keith cried loudly. "The mighty Zandenor is a yellow craven, eh?"

"What?"

"You're afraid to fight the Outworlders," Keith said bitingly. "In front of all your men and mine—and your woman—you admit cowardice. You remind me of some forest animal that has a great smell and makes much noise, but accomplishes little."

Keith saw Zandenor's eyes blaze with rage. "You lie!"

"I speak the truth. Else why do you fear to fight the Outworlders?"

Zandenor strode forward and stood next to Keith, dwarfing him. It took quite a man to make Keith's six feet four look puny.

"I do not fear the Outworlders!" Zandenor asserted.

"Then why refuse to fight them?" Keith asked. "Surely you would welcome the challenge?"

He saw that he had somehow penetrated Zandenor's thick skull. The giant chieftain was considering the proposition seriously.

After a long period of thought he nodded. "Stranger, you are right. Zandenor should not be afraid of Outworlders. We will go with you!"

Keith extended his hand. "Shake, then, to signify our alliance!"

Zandenor took Keith's hand in a bonecrushing grip, but Keith kept from showing the pain. He returned the clasp, and then Zandenor pointed toward the south.

"On to Nyawk!" he cried in a deafening bellow. "Swords against the Outworlders!"

That was the beginning—the winning of Zandenor. It gave Keith fifteen men behind him, plus the dubious assistance of one woman. They set out on the trek to Nyawk.

Along the way, the army swelled to thirty, then forty, as every man encountered in the forest was pressed into service. And then something exciting started to happen: word traveled ahead in the forest, and men began to come voluntarily to them, anxious to fight the Outworlders.

Keith felt a mounting impatience to reach fighting strength, now that the thing was catching fire. His army grew by the hour, until by the time the towers of Nyawk came into view, he had a full seventy men at his back.

Trouble was brewing with Zandenor, though. The truce they had reached back at the clearing was short-lived.

"Why should you lead the assault?" the giant asked suddenly, as they trooped through what had been Westchester and emerged in the outer fringes of the city proper.

Keith turned to him. "It was my idea," he said. "You would still be hunting deer in the forest if I hadn't persuaded you to join us."

"That has nothing to do with it," Zandenor rejoined. "I am with you now, and I am the greater warrior. It should be for my glory that these men fight, not yours."

"They are not fighting for my glory," said Keith. "They are fighting to free the world from the Outworlders."

Zandenor laughed harshly. "Not fighting for your glory! I'm not that stupid, Brandston. They fight for you—and not for me."

Keith turned. "Look, Zandenor, we're almost there, and I don't want you spreading dissension among the men now. It's been decided that I'm to command, and—"

"We've decided nothing!"

Zandenor snapped. He lashed out with a ham-like hand and slapped Keith almost off balance. "I'm deciding, now."

Keith cupped his hands and barked, "Halt!" The men came to a puzzled stop, and stood looking at the two leaders. Off in the distance, the towering skyscrapers of Nyawk bit into the late-afternoon sky, lending an odd contrast to the heavy forest all around.

To get so close, and then to fail—Keith spat bitterly, and with an abrupt, savage gesture, sprang upon Zandenor. There was no longer time for arguing; force was the measure required now.

The giant growled his amazement as Keith's fists pounded a tattoo on his rock-like stomach, and drew back. The men ringed themselves around, realizing that this was a battle to the death between their two commanders, that only one man could emerge alive.

Keith saw a red haze of anger before him. Zandenor was a symbol of the kind of stupid, lumplike masses of muscle that had blocked human progress through the ages, and which now threatened to cut off mankind's last hope of an offensive against its oppressors. It would all rise and fall with him in this moment, Keith knew.

He drove his fists into Zandenor again and again without any apparent effect. The giant didn't seem to feel the blows, and continually brushed Keith back with jarring blows. Keith kept close, trying to prevent Zandenor from drawing his huge sword.

But a backhanded blow from the giant's fist sent Keith reeling backward, and then he saw the shining blade of Zandenor's sword raised high.

Quickly he whipped out his own, and squared away for the duel. Zandenor had at least six inches' reach on Keith, and the edge in physical strength was incalculable. Keith had only one advantage —intelligence.

He circled around, keeping out of the big man's reach, parrying the occasional licking thrusts that Zandenor attempted.

"You fight like a woman," the giant snarled.

"Tend to your own," Keith returned, and leaped lightly beneath Zandenor's guard to inflict a flesh wound. Zandenor spat and laughed at the streak of blood that appeared.

Then he surged forward in a frenzied attack that Keith

could barely withstand. It was like fighting a waterfall or a landslide—but somehow Keith held his own.

Keith went into a feinting weave, dancing in and out more like a boxer than a swordsman, seeing all the time the tempting sight of Zandenor's vulnerable throat looming up high above his eye-level. Zandenor thrust heavily; Keith parried. Then it was his turn to launch an offensive, and, making use of the wristwork he had learned with the epee, he drove Zandenor back five steps, seven, eight.

"Watch out for that tree!" Keith called suddenly, at the height of his attack.

It was the oldest trick in the book, but this was a new world with all the slates wiped clean, and it succeeded. Zandenor diverted his attention for the barest fraction of an instant, but that was enough. Keith plunged his sword deep into the giant's throat.

He drew it out as Zandenor sagged slowly to the ground, and looked around, feeling the blood-lust on him. In the back of his mind, Dr. Keith Brandston, the man of civilization who had been of necessity put in storage since the time-jump, nodded approvingly. Taking another's life was something to be regarded with horror—except in a kill-or-be-killed situation. And ridding the world of someone like Zandenor was no great crime.

Keith turned, holding the bloody sword out before him. "Does anyone else care to lead this expedition?"

There was stony silence. His eyes picked out the grinning faces of Elvar, Lodin, and his other early conquests; they were all delighted that such a one as Zandenor should also fall beneath their own conqueror, while Zandenor's old crew stared in open awe at the giant's body.

"All right," Keith said, hearing no reply. "Let's go, then, without any further delays." He raised his dripping sword overhead. "Against the Outworlders!"

"Against the Outworlders!" came the jubilant reply from seventy throats.

New York had not changed, except in name. It was as if it had been held frozen in stasis for thousands of years. There were some buildings that he did not recognize, but some looked much as they had in the distant past. The Outworlders had evidently been content to maintain the

status quo, living in the buildings the Earthmen had so obligingly provided for them.

Upper Manhattan was almost completely deserted. Empty houses stood silent and bare. But as the band moved further south into the strangely noiseless city, Keith came across his first traces of alien life.

They were tall, many-tentacled creatures of repellent appearance. Keith saw his first one from a distance of several blocks, as they came down Riverside Drive. He spotted the weird creature crossing a street, going about some errand of its own.

Suddenly Keith realized the madness of what they were doing. Seventy men, armed only with swords, had descended on a great metropolis, planning to free it from the alien beings who had conquered the entire world.

Still, more foolhardy missions than this one had succeeded. And it would be necessary to free Rhona before the time-jump returned for him, in three more days.

They had their first direct encounter with an Outworlder as they crossed into Columbus Circle at 59th Street. It was a grave-looking, reptilian creature with glittering, many-faceted eyes. It was standing at the entrance to Central Park, and it strode over hastily when it saw them.

"Where are you going?" it inquired, in a weird, harsh voice.

Instead of replying, Keith plunged his sword impulsively into the creature's throat. A cry went up from his men. It was the first blow struck in the defense of Earth in thousands of years!

They moved on. There were more aliens ahead. The concentration grew thicker, until there were some to be seen gathered on every street corner. And Keith discovered an astonishing thing.

The Outworlders were afraid!

They were hanging back, edging uneasily away as the wedge-shaped army of Earthmen, swords bristling, marched down Broadway.

They were putting up no opposition to the Earth warriors. None at all.

"This is a trap," Elvar whispered, as the Outworlders retreated hastily before them. "They must be leading us toward something."

"I don't think so," Keith said. "It's not good tactics. I think they've gone soft. In thousands of years, no one's

dared to question their authority. All the fight has gone out of them."

Keith gestured to two of his men. "Go capture one of the Outworlders. Bring him here."

A moment later, they returned dragging with them one of the loathsome creatures.

"What do you mean by this?" the alien demanded. It seemed extremely insulted at this sort of cavalier treatment.

Keith chuckled. "You mean, what right have we to invade you?" He took a sword from a nearby man and offered it to the alien. "Here. Fight me."

The alien looked in horror at the naked sword, then back at Keith. Its hideous face was wrinkled in an expression close to tears.

"Fight you? But I cannot!"

Keith snatched the sword back triumphantly and turned to his men. "You see? They're soft. Onward, and wipe them out!"

The Earthmen flooded past, happy now to engage in some sort of action. Their warlike souls had been pent up in discipline long enough. Keith watched as they swarmed over the aliens in midtown Manhattan, killing merrily. It was one-sided butchery, nothing else.

He felt a sharp sense of anticlimax. The great war he had looked forward to with such apprehension and had planned for so carefully was a mere rout instead. The aliens were like withered pythons, their poison long since dried away. Nothing remained of the fierce creatures who had conquered the Earth in times long gone.

Keith saw other Earthmen joining his army now—the slaves maintained by the aliens, who, realizing now that they had been duped, that they could have overthrown the masters at any time, were gaily exterminating their Overlords.

The aliens were fleeing rapidly now—and the character of the fight was changing. They were gathering together outside a building Keith did not remember from the old days, one which they had apparently built themselves.

Keith stopped a man in the white tunic of an Earthman slave and asked him, "What's that building, fellow?"

"It's the headquarters for the Overlords," the former slave said. "It's their Sacred Temple. That's where the White Goddess is kept."

The White Goddess! Rhona!

"Onward to the Temple," Keith roared.

The Outworlders seemed to have recovered a little of their old fighting ability now that their very temple was threatened. They were battling with grim determination on the steps of the bizarre-looking edifice. Keith was in the thick of the fray, hewing away at the massed aliens, cutting a path through their midst.

The breakthrough came before long, and the Earthmen spilled into the Temple, dashed through quiet halls where alien priests were moving slowly to and fro, engaged in mysterious rituals of their own.

And then, suddenly, Keith found himself in front of a room whose door was covered with precious jewels. A priest stood in front, holding a tapering, gem-encrusted spear.

"You cannot go in there," the alien said.

Keith brought down his sword, found it pushed aside by the spear, wrested his weapon up and plunged it deep into the alien's body. Amber liquid welled forth.

Keith shoved the dead priest to one side and threw open the door. Within, a woman sat on a gleaming throne.

She rose in astonishment. "What's hap—*Keith!*"

He rushed toward her, sheathing his sword. Behind him, he saw Elvar's grinning, ugly face appear. The squat man smiled, then turned his back and stood guard.

Rhona Donavan gasped out her story in sentences broken by tears of relief. As Keith pieced it together, she had, indeed, been sent shortly after him—ten days after, as a matter of fact. The time-jump sent to retrieve Keith had returned empty, and she had volunteered immediately to go into the future to find him. No one else had stepped forward, and finally, reluctantly, they had allowed her to make the journey.

But, through some error in calculation, she had arrived a year before Keith, in a world where he had never been. She had landed in the midst of Nyawk, where the aliens had instantly imprisoned her in the Temple, using her as priestess in rites which she refused to try to describe.

"And now it's all over!" she said, weak with relief.

"It's all over," Keith said. "The aliens are being whipped right and left. It turned out they were really incapable of fighting any more, and

my men are busy exterminating them."

"How wonderful!" Rhona exclaimed.

"The time-jump will be coming for me in three days," Keith told her. "We can both go back, and—"

Suddenly he broke off. "But I *didn't* go back, did I? The time-jump returned empty, which is why you came forward in the first place, and so I never went back—"

He stopped, frowning over the complexities of time travel.

"Listen," Rhona said. "They're cheering for you down below. They must have wiped out the last alien."

Sure enough, from the street came the mighty roar of *"Brandston! Brandston!"*

Keith turned to her. "Rhona?"

"Yes, Keith?"

"Now I know why that time-jump returned without me. My job's not over. It's just beginning.

"I was wrong to think that my big problem was overthrowing the Outworlders. It was ten times as hard to build an army as it was to win with it. The aliens are wiped out —or will be, as soon as we take care of the other cities —but that's by far the easiest part of the job. The real task is rebuilding the world, teaching these Earthmen how to live with each other again. That's my job—and I can't leave it. But of course when the time-jump comes, you can go back," he added, sadly. He knew now that he could not return. His place was here, as leader of the reborn world.

But he could not ask her to give up her existence and remain here with him, in this barbaric world.

He looked at her.

"Darling," she said, smiling, after a moment. "Why can't you understand that the time-jump returned to 1958 *completely empty?* You were not in it—but neither was I! I was back there in the past —worrying about you!"

"Empty?"

She nodded. "I didn't go back then—and I'm not going back now."

"You're staying here?" he asked, half-believing.

From below, the chanting grew more insistent. *"Brandston! Brandston, our king!"*

Her eyes sparkled. "You hear that? They're pleading for you. You've got a whole world to rebuild," she said. "And every king needs a queen!"

THE END

BY THE READERS

Dear Editor:

What's this I hear about *Fantastic* going monthly? Wonderful! When?

My main purpose for writing this is to correct a misprint you have in "The Book Rack." In the review for the "Shrinking Man" it says: "The result is a second-rate and disappointing effort." It should say: "The result is a very good and horrifying story."

Does anyone have any *Fantastic* novels, *Famous Fantastic Mysteries,* or A. Merritt's *Fantasy* for sale cheap? If you do send me a list.

I'm looking forward to *Dream World.*

Wilford Lee
716 Linden St.,
Boise, Idaho

• *You heard right, chum.* Fantastic *is monthly right now! Of course it will take a couple of issues to get into the swing of the new distribution speedup. But within a fairly short time,* Fantastic *will hit the stands promptly at the beginning of each month. That's not the half of it, though. We're going to town with new features, more art, etc., until* Amazing Stories *will have to hump to keep even. Incidently,* Dream World *was such a success that we're embarrassed. Didn't*

print enough copies. So if you haven't bought it already and see a copy on a newsstand, for heaven's sake grab it. That first issue will no doubt become a collector's item.

Dear Editor:

You seem to be always in the process . . . or I should say the confusion of creating something new and something that no other company would even think about. I am speaking of PEN PALS and *Dream World,* etc. Sitting here reading "Man of Many Bodies" I just happened to come up with a conception of something new which I thought I would pass along to you.

I think that some publishing company (and you are my favorite) should publish a magazine strictly for amateur and beginning s-f writers . . . some of which show promise and may really have it, but just because they are unknown have nothing to show for their efforts.

This could be termed a Writers' Club or anything of the sort. Writers who write for the love of writing and the hope of seeing something of their own in print and expecting no pay.

Incidentally "Man of Many Bodies" is right good. I am glad that Harry gets out on the good side.

Herman Frye
408 Alleghany Rd.,
Hampton, Virginia

• *Your idea has merit in many ways, but from our standpoint it's impractical because we doubt if there are enough young s-f writers to support a magazine. If we thought there were, you can be sure we would have such a magazine on the stands next week. By the way, did you get your copy of* PEN PALS? *How did you like it?*

Dear Editor:

I've just finished the February issue of *Fantastic;* and found the most enjoyable item in the magazine was the announcement that you are going monthly! This means that I'll have to scrounge up my subscription renewal twice as often, but believe me, it's well worth it! I never thought that we'd be back to the frequency of publication that the old

Amazing Stories and *Fantastic Adventures* enjoyed, but you've done it!

The cover this month was another of Valigursky's well done but out of perspective illustrations that certainly lived up to the title of the magazine! However, it undoubtedly served its purpose in getting people to pick up the magazine. The lead novelette was quite different from your usual type of yarn, and I found it both heartwarming and very good. The Finlay illustration was also excellent, and it seems that Virgil is beginning to hit his stride again with some really fine work.

The rest of the yarns were readable and enjoyable, although somewhat far-fetched as in the case of Harlan Ellison's yarn. I always am in favor of "series" type yarns if the authors can produce good stories about the character; and I hope that Bob Silverberg can work out something with the possibility started with "The Mystery of Deneb IV."

Always happy to see additions to the features of the magazine, as I think they really help the book. The letters column read a little better this time also; less evidence of cutting.

All in all, a good issue, and I'll be looking forward to seeing *Fantastic* in the mailbox every month along with *Amazing*.

Herbert E. Beach
210 West Paquin
Waterville, Minn.

• *As a subscriber to both* Amazing *and* Fantastic, *Mr. Beach, you are a very special person and your opinions are doted on here in the office. Even sent a memo to Ellison: "Don't be so far-fetched after this. You're annoying our Mr. Beach." Seriously, we're glad you and thousands of others like our books and we'll never let you down.*

. . . A mystery which has never been solved or even explained occurred in Devonshire, England, on the night and morning of February 8-9, 1855. Peculiar hoofprints were discovered in the deep snow which covered England at the time. The impressions were oval, about the size of a donkey's hoofprint, and proceeded across country straight as a die, about eight inches apart. The uninterrupted track covered 98 miles, passed through 15 towns, and even crossed a river. In several cases, the prints showed that whatever the thing was which had made them, it had gone straight up the side of a house or barn, across the roof, and down the other side.

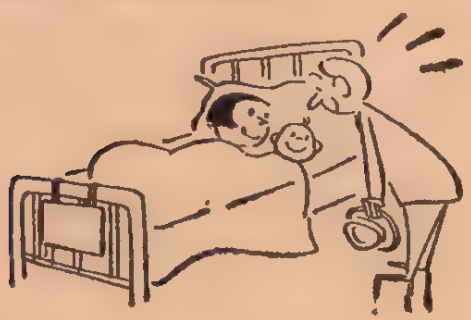
IT SOUNDS FANTASTIC, BUT . . . (Continued from page 3)

Three years ago a Picture Butte, Alta., housewife broke a leg at Hallowe'en. Two years ago she broke an arm. The following year, also at Hallowe'en, she again broke an arm. Next year she'll stay in bed while she's ahead!

Just as choir members at a Nebraska church were singing the anthem, "Lord Have Mercy" the choir loft ceiling collapsed.

An Iron Mountain, Mich., couple are used to seeing double. They have twin daughters, twin grandsons, twin uncles, twin nieces, and twin grandnephews.

During the same day, a Peoria, Ill., couple received news that sons had been born to their daughters, living in Chicago and Fort Worth, Texas, respectively.



Two half-brothers from Baton Rouge, La., who had been out of touch with each other for four years, were reunited at Fort Ord, Calif., when both became ill and were placed in the pneumonia ward.

A Merrick, L. I., man, fed up with life, remarked to a druggist, "I wish I'd drop dead." As he left the store, he dropped dead on the sidewalk.

A Cleveland woman whose birthday is the same as her husband's, gave birth to a boy on their joint birthday.

A twice-escaped French convict went to a Paris picture show, sat down on the lap of a criminal investigation agent and was soon back in prison.

When Mrs. D. C. Mills, of Vredhoek, South Africa, advertised for a maid, the first applicant was a Mrs. White who informed her that she was the mother of twin girls. Later in the day, another Mrs. White applied for the job—she, too, had twin daughters.

—PAUL STEINER

FREAK SHOW

By HALL THORNTON

The show was a success. The crowds cheered and the band played. But which were the customers and which the freaks?

"AND here's the Man from Mars," the sideshow barker said ringingly. "Brought to this planet at *fantastic* expense, kept alive only through day-and-night care by a team of skilled scientists traveling with this circus."

Davy Kilbourne felt his mouth sag open. He turned to Les Barclay. "Jeez, look at that! From *Mars*, yet!"

"You fall for that stuff, Davy?" From the vantage-point of his fourteen years, Les could play cynic well. "Why, that's just a fake suit."

"Don't believe it," Davy

The talker made his pitch. The boys stared in wonder.

said vehemently. At twelve, he was anxious to appear wise, but just as hopeful of seeing a real Martian.

The creature on the platform, real or not, was certainly convincing. It was contained in a tank of some clear, viscous fluid. Green-skinned, small and wiry, with four jointed legs and a tangle of boneless tentacles in place of arms, the Martian stared forward at the crowd before it. Its eyes—it had just two—were round and lidless; deep, they seemed filled with loneliness and longing for home.

"He looks unhappy," Davy said.

Les snorted. "You'd be too, if you had to wear an outfit like that on a hot day."

The barker flourished his arms in the air for silence. "Ladies and gentlemen! You've seen our Man from Mars—now, who'll pay two bits, the fourth part of a dollar, to step inside this tent and see the rest of our interstellar menagerie? Twenty-five cents, good people, for a view at the strangest denizens of the galaxy! Step right this way, if you please."

Davy fumbled in his pockets and pulled out a quarter. He looked at it soulfully; it was all that there was left of his allowance for the week, and it was only Wednesday. Then he glanced up at the Martian again, and at the beckoning flap of the menagerie tent.

"You goin' in there?" Les asked.

Davy nodded eagerly. "Sure! Don't you want to see—"

"Yeah, yeah. Interstellar denizens." Les chuckled. "You really eat all that junk up, don't you? Look here—how come the government don't say anything, if there's Men from Mars on Earth? We can't even go to the Moon yet."

A momentary doubt flickered across Davy's face. Then he shook his head. "It's only a quarter, Les."

Something appeared at the tent flap—something tall and angular, with grainy red skin. It was visible for a second, then moved back into the shadows. Davy's eyes widened.

"Come on— I'm going in there. You?"

He stared at the older boy, who tried unsuccessfully to conceal his own curiosity. After a minute, Les dug down and produced a quarter too.

"Two tickets, please."

The tent was bigger than it seemed from the outside, and had a strange, alien smell about it. The two boys stood at the entrance, looking around.

There were a dozen exhibits, each in its own cage.

"Over here," Davy said. "Man from Jupiter."

They stared. The Man from Jupiter was a monstrous slug, round and featureless, that lay still, its vast slimy sides moving up and down slowly. Every few minutes it emitted a deep grunt and quivered.

The barker came over to them. "Straight from the Solar System's biggest planet," he said. His voice was rich and full; he was a good barker, Davy thought. "Our collecting team suffered four casualties getting him."

"He's pretty big himself," Davy said.

"Fifteen feet in circumference. He could swallow you in one gulp. His mouth's on the other side. We feed him a live cow every Sunday."

"What's that over there?" Les asked.

"He's from Saturn. A spider man."

It was the red-skinned creature that had poked its grotesque face through the tent-flaps before. It was moving around, uncaged. Tall, shambling, with four jointed arms about an inch in diameter. It wasn't pretty.

"How come you let him move around?" Davy asked.

"They're harmless, and they enjoy the company," the barker said.

Les nudged Davy and jerked his head in the direction of the spider man. The Saturnian was surreptitiously slipping one of his bony arms inside someone's pocket.

"That's why they let him walk around," Les whispered. "He's a trained pickpocket! These guys are just crooks!"

Davy blinked in surprise as the spider man extracted a wallet and deftly tucked it in the folds of his voluminous robe. "Maybe they are," he whispered back. "But they're *real,* all the same."

Les grinned and moved on. The next exhibit was a Venusian. It swam in a tank of dark green liquid, and resembled a horned octopus. It moved in slow, dignified circles, staring at the gaping sideshow customers with sedate majesty. Davy tried to picture the world from which the creature had come. Suddenly, goosepimples crept down his neck as he thought

of the amazing wonderland of space and the strange planets that lay out there, waiting for Man to reach them.

Or had Man reached them? It was funny, Davy thought, that no one knew about it. Evidently these circus people had gone to the planets—why had nobody else?

He shrugged and kept moving. There was a native of Pluto, squatting malevolently on a block of ice. It was all horns and bristles, and was kept behind thick bars. There was a jellyfish-like thing from Uranus, and a strange-looking furry beast hailing from Neptune.

Finally the long summer's day came to its end.

"Suppertime," Les said matter-of-factly. "We better get going or we won't get fed."

"But—"

"You remember what happened the last time you came home late," Les reminded him. "You want to get tarred again?"

Davy didn't. Reluctantly, he left the Big Top, passed over the circus grounds, and started up the street toward home.

At supper, Davy's father remarked, "Well, we've finally got those fakers chased out of town."

"Which fakers, Dad?"

"Why, that carnival, of course. That phony circus with the Men from Mars. I suspected all along that they were just pickpockets and thieves, but we got the goods on them today. Seems Police Chief Harkins was there, and the Man from Saturn grabbed his wallet. That was all they needed. Judge Lewis issued a court order, and they're clearing out tomorrow at dawn. Today was the last day for them."

Davy was silent. He stared unhappily at his soup. So the circus was going, eh? And he'd been hoping to squeeze a quarter from his bank upstairs and go back for another look at the other-world beings.

Now he would never get the chance. The circus would move on, and they'd never come back to Hoytsville. Angrily, he kicked the leg of the kitchen table—not hard enough for his father to notice, but hard enough to express some anger.

"And where were *you* today, Davy?" his mother asked. "You and Les were out from dawn to dusk."

"Why, we were—" He stopped. Suddenly he didn't

want to talk about the circus at all. "We went down to the picnic grounds. We had a swim and played ball. It was a real good day."

"That's odd—your hair's not wet at all."

"Oh—the sun was hot. We came out early and dried off playing ball."

"I see," his mother said. But she didn't seem convinced.

When bedtime came, Davy's feeling of dejection still had not left him. He made his goodnights and traipsed off to his bedroom, hating Police Chief Harkins and Judge Lewis and all the other people who had driven the circus away. He hated the whole town—the whole dull Earthbound town.

He gasped. He knew what he wanted.

He could get away—away from these tiresome people, away from this dreary town.

What of it if the circus people were just phonies and pickpockets? That was the life, Davy thought happily.

And if the men from other worlds happened to be real—

That didn't matter. He knew where he wanted to go, what he wanted to do.

Silently, he climbed out of bed and slipped back into his clothes. He made a little bundle—his baseball mitt, his toothbrush, an extra pair of socks. The night was cool, so he put a jacket on.

Then he slipped down the back way, through the silent kitchen, out into the alley. He broke into a run, moving as fast as his short legs could go.

The circus was chaotic. Men were everywhere, taking down the trapezes, pulling the concession booths apart, lowering the tents. An elephant stood patiently to one side; the spidery Man from Saturn was wandering around the scene, but otherwise none of the other-world creatures were to be found.

Davy moved determinedly through the busy grounds, stepping over cables and around trucks. Finally he found the man he was looking for.

The barker was busy directing the handling of a couple of animal cages. He brushed Davy away impatiently, but the boy continued to tug at his sleeve.

Finally the barker turned. "What do you want, boy?" he asked, in his rich, resonant voice.

"You leaving tonight?"

"That's right, kid. We're pulling up stakes."

"I heard about it. Too bad, mister."

"Yeah—isn't it? Why don't you go home and go to bed, now? We've got a lot of work before morning."

"That when you're leaving?" Davy asked. "Morning?"

"First thing in the morning. We'll be out of here by 7 A.M. Go away now, huh?"

Davy stepped back and watched the barker in silence for a moment more. Then, deepening his voice to make it sound more impressive, he said, "You think you got room for another hand?"

"No," the barker said without turning around. "We've got plenty. Go away."

"But—you sure? Sure you can't use somebody extra? like *me*, for instance?"

The sideshow man was silent for a moment. Then he turned, frowning, and stared down at Davy. The silence seemed to last forever. Finally he said, "You know, maybe we can. Sure—we can use you."

"You mean that?"

The barker nodded. "Sure. You've got the circus way about you. You can come along with us."

Davy was too delighted to be able to say anything. He grinned nervously and gulped. Visions of big cities—Detroit, Chicago, maybe even New York—opened out before him. A lifetime with the circus!

"Gosh," he said. "Thanks, mister."

"Nothing of it, son."

"And where's the next stop? Where's the circus heading from here? Chicago? Texas, maybe?"

The barker smiled, showing bright white teeth. "Mars," he said.

Sometime later, Davy awoke.

There was a crowd around him, and he smelled the familiar smells of the circus. *I must have been asleep,* he thought. *I missed the whole trip.*

The barker had said they were going to Mars. That was silly, of course. But where were they?

He looked around—

And felt cold chills wriggle down the middle of his back.

There were the familiar other-world men. The Man from Jupiter pulsated hideously in his vat, the Man from Venus still swam with dignity. They were all there—all except the Man from Mars. Davy didn't see him, the first time around.

Then he looked through the

open flap of the tent, and he did see him. He was standing just in front of the tent, on the outside. And Davy was on the inside, with the other-world creatures.

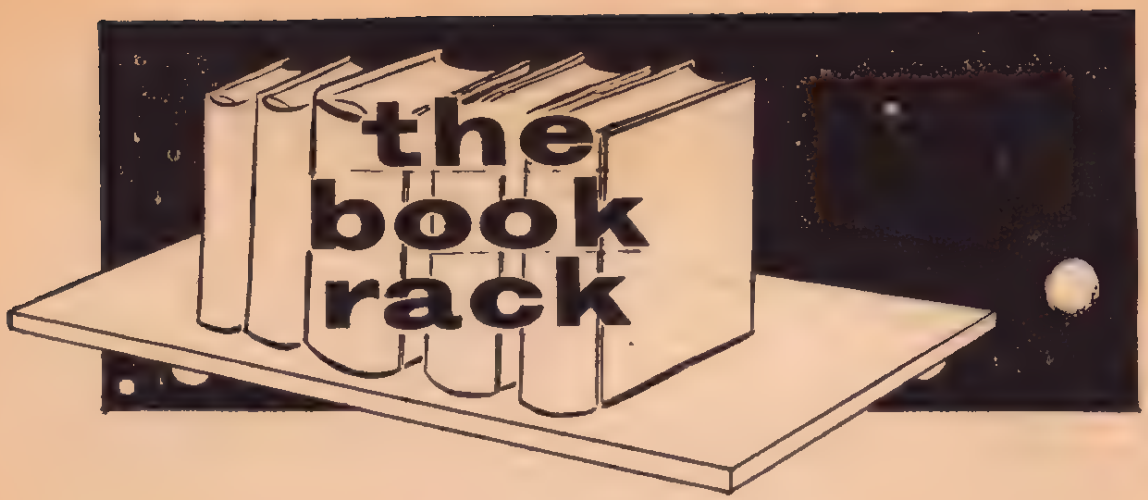
Davy peered a little further through the tent flap and looked at the audience. It was a good crowd outside, there on the sandy, windswept reddish ground. They were all small and wiry, with tangled boneless tentacles.

The one on the platform was speaking, and his voice was that of the barker's, deep and resonant. What he was saying was impossible gibberish, in a strange and alien language. But Davy knew suddenly what he was saying.

He was saying, "Step right up, ladies and gents. Put your money on the line and enter this tent. Within, you'll see the wonders of the Galaxy—including a genuine, real-live Man from Earth, the only one in captivity. Step right up, folks—step right up!"

THE END

"Now will you marry me?"



By VILLIERS GERSON

THE BEST FROM FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION: *Series 6. Edited by Anthony Boucher. Doubleday. $3.50.*

Since Anthony Boucher gave up that grim pursuit of humor which plagued the pages of his excellent magazine for so long a time, his publication and its ensuing anthologies have shown great improvement. What's more, the humor has become more genuine—as C. M. Kornbluth demonstrates in "The Cosmic Expense Account," although at times it skirts the edge, as is evidenced by the parody, "The Barbarian," Poul Anderson's japing at the "Conan" tales.

If you like adventure with overtones of iron, you'll like another Anderson item, "The Man Who Came Early," in Poul's favorite vein, the Nordic; and there's another adventure story, "The Silk and the Song" which its author, Charles L. Fontenay, has invested with a difference—the reverse twist you might call the "F & S-F angle."

For those who enjoy the crawl at the nape of the neck which a blandly horrific tale can bring, there's Frederik Pohl's "The Census Takers." In the same genre, read also Ward Moore's "No Man Pursueth," and "The Shoddy Lands," by C. S. Forester.

Other writers, each with stories which are not easily classified because of their individuality, are Ray Bradbury and "Icarus Montgolfier Wright"; Avram Davidson with "King's Evil"; Theodore Sturgeon with "And Now the News . . ."; and the tender "Final Clearance" of Rachel Maddux. Even

the shortest tale in the fifteen contained herein, "I Don't Mind," by Ron Smith is a gem.

Here again is proof that F & S-F consistently publishes more of the top science fiction and fantasy stories than any other magazine in the field.

TIME FOR THE STARS. *By Robert A. Heinlein. 244 pp. Scribner's. $2.75.*

Tom and Pat Bartlett (the former the narrator of the story) are identical twins living in the 21st Century. It is a time when the Earth is already overpopulated, with 90 million new mouths being added to the hungry population each year. Travel to the stars is now a necessity, and the newly invented "torchship," which travels at close to the speed of light, can take Man to the stars. But how can he report back his explorations when a message from the nearest star would take over 4 years to reach Earth, even at light-speed? The answer is found by a philanthropic foundation which sends out the first explorers: to find identical twin telepaths (telepathy is independent of physics), keep one on Earth as a transmitter-receiver, and send the other out with the expedition. Tom Bartlett is the twin selected to go to the stars.

But then it is discovered that as men travel at speeds close to that of light, they undergo amazing changes in time as well —and away we go into one of those superb Heinlein stories which possess pace and excitement, suspense and reality, understanding and conviction. Here is the Stevenson of science fiction once again demonstrating that at his best there are very few writers in s-f who can touch him. You'll like this one.

ONE AGAINST THE MOON. *By Donald A. Wollheim. 220 pp. World. $2.75.*

When the Earth's first atomic rocket goes up on its test flight, a stowaway is aboard it—a young orphan named Robin Carew. The new fuel being much more powerful than even its inventors had imagined, the rocket winds up *inside* the moon—for it is the author's contention that the moon is honeycombed with bubbles, air pockets which also contain water, vegetation, animals, and even higher life forms.

The young stowaway (and surely the coincidence between

the names "Robin Carew" and "Robinson Crusoe" must be intended) explores his new home, makes friends with and saves the life of a Moonman Friday, and finally meets another Terran, a rocket pilot sent up by the Russians. With his help, Robin manages to signal Earth and the two are rescued.

Mr. Wollheim makes some ridiculous assumptions, and even more ridiculous coincidences: Robin's rocket is saved from destruction because it hits the moon at just the right angle to plow through a bubble and end up unharmed; the Russian pilot turns out to be Robin's long-lost brother; but because the author is a natural (even if lazy) storyteller, he has written a story which has pace at the price of credibility.

IT'S THE DARNDEST WORLD - - -

. . . one of the strangest arguments for the power of heredity is to be found in the story of two identical twin boys who were born in Nebraska. Separated at the age of one year, they were adopted by separate families who lived fifty miles apart. Neither boy knew of the adoption, nor even of the existence of the other twin. Yet when they finally met, they discovered that both:

1) were repairmen for the same state telephone company;
2) were married in the same year to the same type of girl;
3) had one child, a son;
4) owned one dog, a fox terrier who, in both cases, was named "Trixie"!

●

. . . there is an eyelid which closes *inside* instead of outside the eye! It is the eyelid of a rare shfi, the cuckoo ray *(Raia Circularis)*, which was discovered in 1932. The lid is round, has a large fringe, and is located inside the eyeball, directly under instead of over the cornea.

●

. . . modern spiritualism was started by two prankish sisters, one of whom had a trick toe. Margaret and Kate Fox, who lived in Hydesville, N. Y. in 1848, decided to play the prank on their parents. Margaret, 15, could crack her trick toe, and make it sound like a rap on wood. The two girls told their parents about mysterious rappings—alleged to have been made by a former occupant of their house who had been murdered. Once the news spread, hundreds stormed the house to attempt to get in touch with departed friends and loved ones. The Fox girls became famous and remained so for 40 years until, in 1888, they confessed that they had started the furor unwittingly with their "talking toe" trick!

SUPERLATIVES - - -

—is the name of a remarkable book that came to our attention recently. It was compiled in England by the Guinness Stout people for the purpose of settling arguments in English pubs. Authoritatively documented, it is an encyclopedia of the biggest, the highest, the shortest, the broadest, the richest, the poorest, the—well, would you like to know the name of the richest man in the world? the smallest bird? the largest drum? the greatest flood? the most expensive automobile? Just look in the book. This quiz was compiled by the editor of "Superlatives." Score five points for each correct answer and see if you can make eighty. If you can, you're good. "Superlatives" costs $2.95 at Superlatives, Inc., at 270 Madison Avenue, New York 16, New York.

---

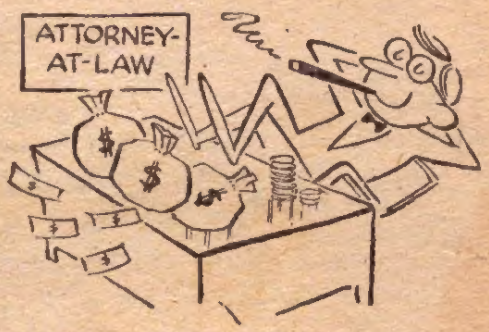
1. The world's richest man is an American.	**T**	**F**
2. The world's handshaking record is held by a Republican.	**T**	**F**
3. The longest measured home-run carried over 600 feet.	**T**	**F**
4. The world's most expensive car is English.	**T**	**F**
5. A man has typed at over 200 words a minute.	**T**	**F**
6. No "Miss America" has ever had a bust measurement over 38 inches.	**T**	**F**
7. The tallest building in Texas is not among the 20 highest in the U. S.	**T**	**F**
8. No man has ever run up the Empire State Building in under 30 minutes.	**T**	**F**
9. Human nerve reflexes travel at over 200 m.p.h.	**T**	**F**
10. The Palomar telescope could detect the light of a candle 40,000 miles away.	**T**	**F**
11. A stone thrown into the deepest part of the ocean would never reach the bottom.	**T**	**F**
12. No human has ever travelled at over 2,500 m.p.h.	**T**	**F**
13. The most widely distributed beer in the world is Danish.	**T**	**F**
14. No murderer under 15 years of age has been electrocuted this century.	**T**	**F**
15. The U. S. A. holds the official world air, sea and land records.	**T**	**F**
16. The tallest of the 33 Presidents was Abraham Lincoln.	**T**	**F**
17. Stacked up in dollar bills the U. S. National Debt would be over 10,000 miles high.	**T**	**F**
18. The commonest name in the U. S. is Davis.	**T**	**F**
19. Every state except Florida has experienced sub-zero temperature.	**T**	**F**
20. The remotest inhabited island in the world is in the Pacific.	**T**	**F**

SUPERLATIVES - - -

ANSWERS

1. F He is the Ruler of Kuwart whose income is $5,100,000 per week.
2. T President Theodore Roosevelt on January 1, 1907.
3. F The longest is 565 feet by Mickey Mantle in 1953.
4. F The $27,440 Spanish Pegaso is the most expensive standard car.
5. F Only Stella Pajunas (216 words a minute) has beaten 200 w.p.m.
6. T Bebe Shopp, 1948, and Evelyn Ay, 1954, set record at 37 inches.
7. T The Republic Bank at Dallas (598 feet) ranks only 21st.
8. F Five Poles made it in 21 minutes in 1932.
9. T A speed of 265 m.p.h. was established in 1943.
10. T This is the light gathering limit of the telescope.
11. F It would do so after sinking for 63 minutes.
12. F We all travel around the sun at 66,000 m.p.h.
13. F Irish Guinness Stout is sold in over 140 countries.
14. F George Stinney, aged 14, went to the chair in 1944.
15. F All three are held by Great Britain.
16. T He stood 6 ft. 4 1/2 ins.
17. T Actually 16,000 miles.
18. F There are 1,504,000 Smiths.
19. F Even Florida hit —2°F in 1899.
20. F It is Tristan da Cunha in the South Atlantic, 1,320 miles from the nearest inhabited land.

BONANZA FOR LAWYERS



. . . the most incredible case of inheritance litigation in history is still going on, and is likely to go on for unnumbered years to come. Mrs. Henrietta Garrett, an 81-year-old widow, died at her home in Philadelphia on November 16, 1930. She left an estate of 17 million dollars—and no will. Since that time, over 26,000 claimants from 47 states and 29 foreign countries have proclaimed themselves her heir, and in attempting to prove their relationship with Widow Garrett, have been represented by over 3,000 lawyers, have committed perjury, faked family records, changed their own names, altered data in family Bibles, and concocted fantastic tales of illegitimacy. The estate, now worth about $30 million, is still unsettled, but twelve litigants have been fined, ten others have received jail sentences, two have committed suicide, and three were murdered!

PRINTED IN U. S. A.

continued from Back Cover

$1.00 IS ALL YOU PAY FOR ANY 3 OF THESE GREAT BOOKS

when you join the Club

Each One Packed from Cover to Cover With Thrills of Top-Flight Science-Fiction

THE ASTOUNDING SCIENCE-FICTION ANTHOLOGY

A story about the first A-Bomb . . . written *before* it was invented! Plus a score of other best tales from a dozen years of *Astounding Science-Fiction* Magazine selected by editor John W. Campbell, Jr. (*Publ. ed. $3.95.*)

THE TREASURY OF SCIENCE-FICTION CLASSICS

World-renowned stories that have stood the test of time—by H. G. Wells, Jules Verne, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Aldous Huxley, Philip Wylie, Edgar Allan Poe, E. M. Forster, F. Scott Fitzgerald, etc. 704 pages. (*Publ. ed. $2 95.*)

OMNIBUS OF SCIENCE-FICTION

43 top stories by outstanding authors . . . . tales of Wonders of Earth and Man . . . of startling inventions . . . visitors from Outer Space . . . Far Traveling . . . Adventures in Dimension . . . Worlds of Tomorrow. 562 pages. (*Publ. ed. $3.50.*)

THE BEST FROM FANTASY AND SCIENCE-FICTION

(*Current Edition*) The cream of imaginative writing . . . selected from the pages of *Fantasy and Science-Fiction Magazine*. Tales of adventure in other worlds . . . mystery, intrigue, suspense in future centuries! (*Publ. ed. $3.50.*)

THE REPORT ON UNIDENTIFIED FLYING OBJECTS

by Edward J. Rupplet

At last! The first authoritative report on hitherto hushed-up facts about "flying saucers" . . . by a fomer Air Force expert who was in charge of their investigation. NOT fiction, but amazing FACT! (*Publ. ed. $4.95.*)

THE DEMOLISHED MAN

by Alfred Bester

Ben Reich had committed "the perfect murder"—except for one thing, the *deadly enemy* that followed Reich everywhere . . . A MAN WITH NO FACE! (*Publ. ed. $2.75.*)

THE EDGE OF RUNNING WATER

by William Sloane

Julian Blair had created a frightening yet amazing machine that would *prove immortality!* "Suspense . . . ingenuity, and excellent description." —N. Y. Times. (*Publ. ed. $3.00.*)

THE LONG TOMORROW

by Leigh Brackett

After the Destruction, the Bible-reading farmers ruled the country. But there was still one community of Sin in the land. Fascinating tale of two young boys' search for the Truth which lay in this town of Evil. (*Publ. ed. $2.95.*)

NOW—THE BEST NEW SCIENCE-FICTION BOOKS FOR ONLY $1.00 EACH!

IMAGINE—ANY 3 of these full-size, brand-new science-fiction books—yours for just $1! Each is crammed with the science thrills of the future . . . written by a top-notch science-fiction author. An $8.65 to $12.40 value, complete in handsome, permanent bindings. Each month the SCIENCE-FICTION BOOK CLUB brings you the finest brand-new full-length books FOR ONLY $1 EACH (plus a few cents shipping charges)—even though they cost $2.50, $3.00 and up in publishers' editions! Each month's selection is described IN ADVANCE. You take ONLY those books you really want—as few as 4 a year.

SEND NO MONEY Mail Coupon TODAY!

Take your choice of ANY 3 of the new books described here—at only $1 for ALL 3. Two are your gift books for joining; the other is your first selection. Mail coupon RIGHT NOW to:

SCIENCE-FICTION BOOK CLUB
Dept. FAN-4, Garden City, N. Y.

WHICH 3 DO YOU WANT FOR ONLY $1.00?

SCIENCE-FICTION BOOK CLUB
Dept. FAN-4, Garden City, New York

Please rush me the 3 books checked below, as my gift books and first selection. Bill me only $1 for all three (plus few cents shipping charges), and enroll me as a member of the Science-Fiction Book Club. Every month send me the Club's free bulletin, "Things to Come," so that I may decide whether or not I wish to receive the coming selection described therein. For each book I accept, I will pay only $1 plus shipping. I do not have to take a book every month (only four during each year I am a member)—and I may resign at any time after accepting four selections.

SPECIAL NO-RISK GUARANTEE: If not delighted, I may return all books in 7 days, pay nothing, and this membership will be cancelled!

- ☐ Astounding Science-Fiction Anthology
- ☐ Best from Fantasy & S-F
- ☐ Demolished Man
- ☐ Edge of Running Water
- ☐ The Long Tomorrow
- ☐ Omnibus of Science-Fiction
- ☐ Report on UFO's
- ☐ Treasury of Science-Fiction Classics

Name_____ (Please Print)

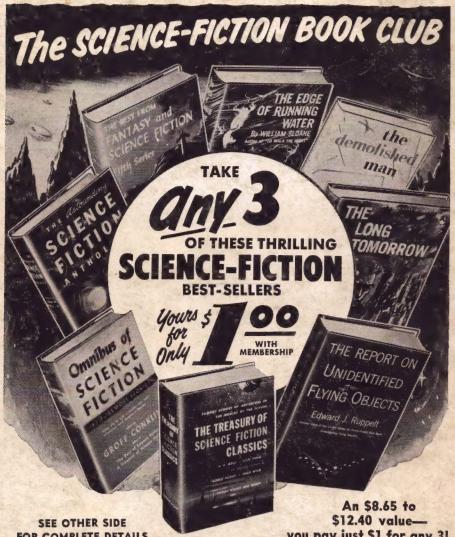
Address_____

City_____ Zone_____ State_____

Selection price in Canada $1.10 plus shipping. Address Science-Fiction Club, 105 Bond St., Toronto 2. (Offer good only in U. S. and Canada.)

The Most Generous Offer Ever Made By

The SCIENCE-FICTION BOOK CLUB



TAKE **any 3** OF THESE THRILLING **SCIENCE-FICTION** BEST-SELLERS

Yours for Only **$1.00** WITH MEMBERSHIP

An $8.65 to $12.40 value— you pay just $1 for any 3!

SEE OTHER SIDE FOR COMPLETE DETAILS

HERE'S an offer that is as thrilling as the spine-tingling stories crammed between the covers of these books! These volumes contain not only "top drawer" science-fiction, but also science FACTS. "Handsome, permanent bindings. Any 3 of them would normally cost you $8.65 to $12.40 in publishers' original editions—but you pay only $1.00 when you join the Club!

This generous offer is made to introduce you to the SCIENCE-FICTION BOOK CLUB, a wonderful new idea in bringing you the best of the new science-fiction books—*at a mere fraction of their usual cost!*

GREAT SCIENCE FICTION

FANTASTIC

MARCH 1957 VOL. 6 NO. 2

GODDESS OF WORLD 21—Hated By Women—Preyed On By Men

fantastic

SCIENCE-FICTION

MARCH 35¢